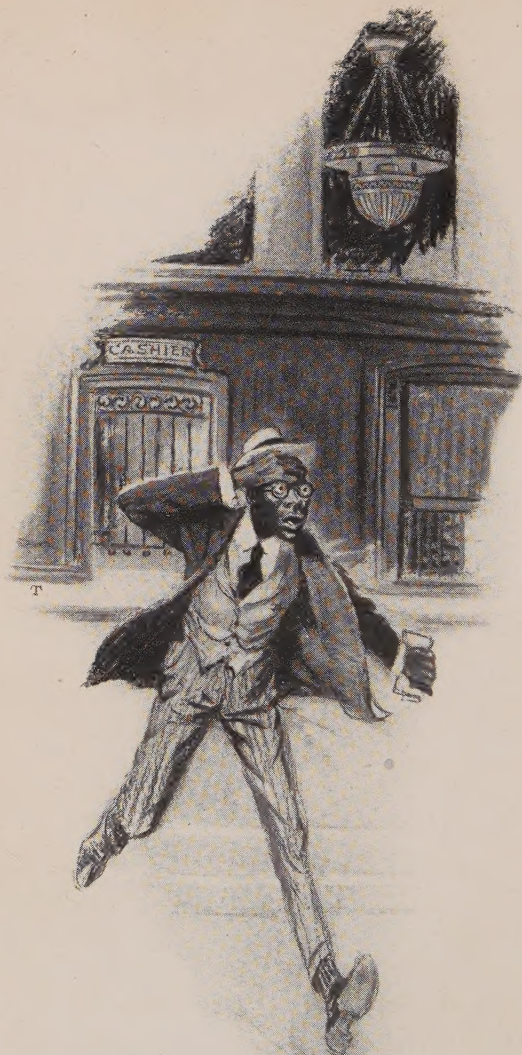


HIGHLY COLORED



OCTAVUS ROY COHEN



HE TRAVELED IN HIGH
WITH THE ACCELE-
TOR DEPRESSED TO THE
LIMIT

Page 108

HIGHLY COLORED

BY
OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

*Author of "Polished Ebony,"
"Come Seven," etc.*

With frontispiece by
H. WESTON TAYLOR



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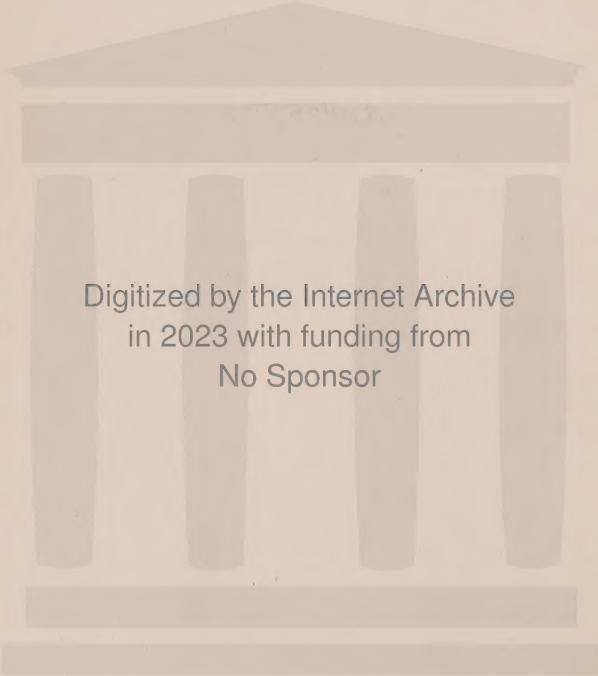
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1921

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GEORGE HORACE LORIMER



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HIGHLY COLORED

AUTO-INTOXICATION

MR. ANOPHELES RICKETTS was peeved, exceedingly peeved. He untangled his excessive legs and elevated himself from the easy-chair before the fireplace. Then he frowned with dark dank disapproval upon his bride of three months.

"I 'clare to goodness gracious, Clarissy," he remarked irritably, "automobiles is the on'y things you don't talk 'bout nothin' else but."

Clarissy pouted. "We is got money enough to buy us a car, honey. Lots of folks which ain't got as much as what we is got is got automobiles."

"Yeh—reckon they is. An' lots of folks is got bills which ain't paid, but we ain't. You jes' quit talkin' with yo' mouth bouten automobiles. 'Tain't gwine git you nowheres, an'—"

"I could of had a automobile," flared Clarissy suddenly. "I sho' could of had a ninety-hawss-power Conley-Detroit if'n I had of chose."

The eyes of the toweringly skinny Anopheles narrowed. "Sometimes," he snapped, "I a'mos' wisht you had of went an' ma'ied that wuthless Adam Shooks."

“You ain’t the on’y one!”

“The on’y one which?”

“The on’y one which wishes I had of ma’ied Adam. When I think of how I could of drove all roun’ in his big car—”

“You is got my premission, Missis Clarissy Ricketts, to do all the ridin’ with Adam Shooks you wishes. The mo’ you is with him the better I likes it, causen what that cullud man ain’t got is no brains, an’ soon’s you git so you ain’t thinkin’ bouten his car all the time, you is gwine fin’ that out.”

“You ain’t r’illy mean that?”

“Which?”

“Bouten I c’n go ridin’ with Adam if’n he asts me?”

“Sho’ nuff I means it. You c’n do anythin’ you pleases previdin’ you quits pesterin’ me bouten we ain’t got no automobile. Automobiles is like colds, Clarissy; they is easy to git an’ hahd to git rid of. An’ all along I is promised you that some day I was gwine buy you one—a reg’lar fine car. But right now I cain’t affohd it, an’—”

“You is got mo’ money than Adam Shooks.”

“Yeh! But I ain’t in the taxicab business, an’ he is. If’n he was to lose his car he’d have less money than what he is got now, an’ I done heard he ain’t got nothin’. Tha’s what kin’ of

a man you is bein' sorry you ain't gone an' ma'ied. How much good you reckon joyrides would be doin' you if'n you ain't had no clothes to wear an' no food to eat? How much you reckon, huh?"

"I ain't so sho' that he ain't got money. With that big—"

"Haw!" snorted Anopheles. "It wa'n't on'y yestiddy he was tryin' to borry th'ee hund'ed dollars offen me to make the las' paymint on that ve'y same big car which he is got. Tha's what kin' of a man he is. Seems like a feller would have mo' se'f-respec' than to try an' borry money offen the man which ma'ied the gal he was engage' to."

Clarissy sighed resignedly. "We ain't on'y been ma'ied th'ee months," said she, "an' a'ready you is beginnin' to unlove me."

"'Tain't no such of a thing," he denied stoutly. "It's on'y that I loves you too much to go broke buyin' a automobile. Automobiles ain't nothin' on'y li'bilities, an' them is things I ain't pretickeler good frien's with these heah days."

"Jes the same," she said, "if'n you loved me a heap I reckon you could git you one."

Anopheles stared hard at her. That sentence rankled. When he eased his gangling fleshless

frame out of the front door a few minutes later it was still rankling.

Anopheles loved his wife; he loved her more than any other man had ever loved any other wife, and there was nothing that he would not do for her—nothing within reason, that is. He shoved his felt hat farther back on an egg-shaped head and passed a talonlike hand across a worried brow.

“The feller what said that all things come to them which loves,” he soliloquized, “sho’ must of lived befo’ automobiles was invented.”

Clarissy’s passion for a car of her very own worried him. He was a man of parts in Darktown, and the lack of a car was the only fly in his ointment of domestic bliss. And he didn’t see how he could buy a car without tying up a sum of money that was certain to cripple his flourishing little tailoring business. He made his way mournfully to the Greater City Garage and bowed a lethargic howdy to the portly white man who greeted him. As for that gentleman, he bustled forward smilingly.

“You’re the very man I wanted to see, Anopheles,” he greeted. “I’ve kept my eyes open and I’ve got the very car you want.”

“Yeh,” came the dolorous answer, “you is got sev’al ve’y cars which I want, but I ain’t got the money which buys ’em.”

The garage magnate rubbed moist palms together unctuously. "This is different. I am about to put my hands on a real bargain. It's a secondhand car but I have inspected it carefully and it is better than the day it rolled out of the shop."

"Name' which?"

"A Rollins touring car. Only run three thousand miles. Don't need ten dollars' repair work. Five nonskid tires all in perfect shape, electric starting and lighting, selective gear shift—three speeds forward and reverse, genuine leather top and upholstery, demountable rims, spotlight—"

"Heah! Hol' on there, Cap'n Kenney. You is done got the idee in yo' haid that I is a millionaire."

"Haven't any such idea at all, Anopheles. I can get this car for you as she stands for six hundred dollars."

"Six hund'ed—" Anopheles perked up. "Terms?"

The white man shook his head in slow negation.

"No-o, the owner demands spot cash. But the car is worth a thousand dollars, and—"

"It could be wuth ten thousand fo' all the good that does me," gloomed Anopheles. "I is been savin' ev'y extry penny I could git a-holt

of fo' the pas' two months 'bout tellin' my wife I is doin' same, an' I is on'y jes' got one hund'ed."

"You might borrow—"

"You knows well as me, Cap'n Kenney, what the poeck says 'bout don' borrow no money an' lend the same amount. Besides, a seconhan' automobile ain't no good as s'curity."

Captain Kenney was an astute white man and he knew his colored brethren. More, he knew the outward symptoms of automobile itch and he saw them intensified in Anopheles Ricketts. He stepped into the driver's seat of his private car and motioned Anopheles to a place beside him. The lanky colored man glanced at him apprehensively. "Whar you is gwine to?"

"I'm going to show you that Rollins car. It's the greatest bargain of the age. You've simply got to buy it!"

Ten minutes later they parked before the Harden Garage. Captain Kenney led the elongated Anopheles between two lines of cars and came to a prideful stop before the Rollins.

Anopheles' eyes popped. His fingers twitched enviously as he took in the glories of the second-hand car scintillant with a new coat of paint.

"Six hund'ed dollars," he muttered softly. "My Gawd! Miss Agnes—it's that cheap!"

Captain Kenney argued. He pleaded and ca-

joled. But Anopheles was nothing if not canny. He simply did not have the money and there was an end to it. But he had acquired an overwhelming love for the Rollins touring car, and the last sentence of the garage man before they parted remained graven in his mind:

“I’ll see that they hold the car a week, Anopheles. It’s a wonderful bargain and I’d like to see you benefit by it.”

What a car!

Anopheles trembled with delight as he envisioned himself at the wheel of the Rollins; at the wheel of his own new wonderful car, driving it up to the house as a surprise for his delectable young wife.

Anopheles knew something about automobiles. He had driven almost every make of car at one time or another. Of course he was not overly familiar with an automobile’s innards, but he did know how to handle the wheel and the gear shift. And he knew now—knew definitely and positively, once and for all—that he wanted that Rollins five-passenger, wanted it with a desire that was almost agonizing. And he was grimly determined to stop at nothing short of bankruptcy to get it.

It meant more to him than the mere satisfying of a wifely whim. There was always Adam Shooks to be considered. Mr. Shooks was considerable man as men go; and though he was in-

clined to embonpoint Anopheles was no Adonis. There was just as much to him physically as there was to Adam, but the linear dimensions of Anopheles were astounding. If only he could raise an additional five hundred dollars.

With head bent forward on a pitifully inadequate neck he turned the corner of Eighteenth Street and Second Avenue. There was a collision and a grunt and the two men separated—one long and narrow, the other short and thick. The latter smiled.

“I’m dawg’d if’n ’tain’t ’Nopheles Ricketts.”

Anopheles grunted. “ ‘Lo, Adam.”

Mr. Shooks grinned amiably. “You is the ve’y man I was lookin’ to see.”

“You wasn’t lookin’ keen, else you woul’n’t of bumped into me just now.”

Mr. Shooks gave his lengthy friend a playful nudge. “G’wan! ’Nopheles, you always was the humorestes’ feller.”

Anopheles eyed the fat one suspiciously.

Excessive friendliness on the part of Adam was a positive sign of financial difficulties in which Mr. Ricketts was not interested.

“What you want, Mistuh Shooks?”

“Want how?”

“You said you was lookin’ fo’ me.”

“Ain’t it the truth?”

“Fo’ which?”

“We-e-ll”—Adam fidgeted in momentary embarrassment—“it’s jes’ a li’l matter of feenancial trouble.”

“Huh! Seems like you an’ money trouble is twins.”

“Anyways, we knows each other when we passes.”

“An I ain’t ’specially intrusted.”

“Yes you is. Ten puh cent intrus’.”

“Ten puh cent don’ git me nothin’ if’n the principal what I lends don’ never git returned back to me.”

“Yeh, but this money will be.”

“How much?”

“Two hund’ed dollars. I ast you fo’ th’ee hund’ed the other day, but sence then I went an’ won a hund’ed on the Blood Gig in Cap’n Jackson Ramsay’s Pool an’ Ginuwine lott’ry, an’ I on’y needs two hund’ed mo’. An’ you knows well as me, ’Nopheles, that two hund’ed dollars ain’t no money a-tall, countin’ a man is got a heap of money like what you is got.”

“Yeh—an’ I di’n’t git it by lendin’ it out at ten puh cent intrus’ ’thout no s’curity to no-count cullud folks liken to what you is.”

“Who says I ain’t got no s’curity?”

“Who says you is?”

“I does.”

“What ’tis?”

“My Conley-Detroit car. I owes th’ee hundred dollars on it, an’ w’en tha’s paid the car is all mine. I kin give you a mo’gage on it.”

“Heap of good a mo’gage is gwine do me if’n the car gits bust’ up.”

“Tha’s a swell car,” pleaded Adam desperately. “Ninety-hawss power, in puffec’ condition, an’ guaranteed to make ninety miles a hour. They ain’t a car in this heah State of Alabama which c’n come within twenty miles of that car’s dust if’n I don’ want.”

“An’ they ain’t a man c’n come within twenty miles of c’lectin’ two hund’ed dollars from you ifn’ you ain’t got it.”

“But I will have it, pervidin’ I c’n make my las’ payment on the automobile. It’s them payments which has been holdin’ me back from makin’ a heap of money.”

Anopheles looked at him sharply. “How long you wants this two hund’ed dollars fo’?”

“Six months.”

“Ten puh cent intrus’?”

“You said it.”

“An if’n it ain’t paid I c’n take yo’ car?”

“You is tootin’ now.”

Anopheles placed hands in trousers pockets and teetered alarmingly as he gave himself over to a brief siege of intensive thought.

“Hm!” he remarked at length. “A-ah hm!”

“You is gwine do it?”

Lack of due consideration was not one of Mr. Ricketts’ besetting sins. He turned away—positively.

“See me down to my sto’ at fo’ ’clock this afternoon,” he invited. “I’ll give you an answer then.”

“But, ’Nopheles—”

“Fo’ ’clock!” snapped Anopheles. “I done said it.”

He reached his shop and inspected progress on a suit which his tailor had under construction. Well satisfied he made his way toward the door, seated himself in a chair, lighted a cigarette and picked up a copy of *The Weekly Epoch*.

Outside, Eighteenth Street—the Broadway of Birmingham’s Darktown—seethed with traffic. Street cars jangled noisily by the door, an orchestrion blared its siren song into the air, newsboys shrilled their wares, an ebony mendicant strummed on a guitar and chanted the ancient and honorable lay of the jay bird that perched nudely on a hickory limb.

Anopheles Ricketts perused first the church news, then the lodge news, the social columns and finally the advertisements. And suddenly the forelegs of his chair banged to the ground

and he stared at an advertisement that had been running in *The Weekly Epoch* through the last several issues; an advertisement suddenly pregnant with personal interest.

It told in large smeary type of a wonderful automobile race which was to be run of negroes, by negroes and for negroes at the State Fair Grounds at Fairview the following Saturday afternoon. Entries were invited. Admission, one dollar.

There were to be several minor dashes, but the grand event of the afternoon was a twenty-five-mile race round the one-mile dirt track, in which four noted negro professional drivers had entered. The prize was five hundred dollars. No entrance fee.

Anopheles Ricketts stared raptly into space, jaw slightly unhung, immense feet flat upon the floor, long fingers gripping knees of amazing skinniness. An idea had hit him and hit him hard. He didn't have to dovetail it; it was a scheme utterly flawless. But there was one thing that needed verification, and he rose suddenly, angled through the door and strode down the street with enormous space-eating strides.

He sought Florian Slappey and found him lounging before the Frolic Theater, the left lapel of his coat decorated with an enormous celluloid button bearing the inscription: Magic

City Automobile Fast Racing Association—
Chairman—Official.

Florian looked up without especial interest as Anopheles luffed into the wind and lost headway before him. Anopheles' eyes were popped open with excitement and his fingers were closing and opening nervously.

“Brother Slappey?”

The Beau Brummelish young negro looked up languidly from under a floppy Panama hat. He casually flipped a bit of dust from a flowered waistcoat, tenderly touched a purple necktie, inhaled a satisfying puff of Turkish blend and made answer: “Tha’s the name I goes by.”

“You is cheerman of this heah automobile races which is to be ran to the fair grounds Saddy afternoon?”

“I is.”

“Does you know sumthin’ bouten these heah fo’ prefessional drivers which has a’ready entered?”

“I does.”

“H-h-how fas’ does their cars go?”

Florian gazed up in frank surprise. “How fas’ does they go?”

“Tha’s what I requested to know.”

Mr. Slappey reached into an inner pocket of his pearl-gray suit and produced a batch of clippings. He glanced over several of them in

an intently studious fashion. "The fastest which any of 'em is ever made on a one-mile di't track, liken to the one at the fair grounds, is fifty-eight miles a hour fo'twen'y-five miles."

"Fifty-eight miles a hour? Is you shuah?"

"I is ontirely positive."

"Wigglin' gol'fish! Why, that ain't no speed a-tall. If'n their cars cain't make no mo'n that, why— Does you take any mo' entries fo' that twen'y-five-mile race?"

"We is always receptive to new cars up to Friday."

"How much entrance fee?"

"Fifty dollars deposit with the entry so's to insuah that the car will staht. Soon's it stahts the fifty stan's refunded, which makes it no fee a-tall. Not nary nickel. It on'y guarantees that they will be a race."

"An' these heah racin' niggers ain't never made s'much as a mile a minnit?"

"Nope. Why you is askin' all this foolishment? Does you know any cullud man heahabouts which is anxious an' desireous to enter an' git in?"

"Does I?" Anopheles' long lean face was split by a broad grin. "I reckon yes I does. You is gwine heah from me by t'night. S'long!" Anopheles swung on his heel, walked swiftly to Twentieth Street, turned south, crossed the

L. & N. railroad tracks and came eventually to the Conley-Detroit agency in the heart of Automobile Row. He cornered one of the salesmen.

"Lis'en heah, white folks. I asks you a question an' I wants a hones'-t'-Gawd answer. How fas' will a Conley-Detroit towerin' car run?"

The salesman smiled good-naturedly. "Ninety miles an hour; guaranteed."

"I ain't worryin' bouten that guarantee business, cunnel. What I wants to know: Will it run ninety miles?"

"It'll do a hundred."

"You ain't talking fumadiddles with me?"

"That's the positive truth. See here."

The salesman produced many-colored literature to prove his statement. When Anopheles left the establishment he wore a broad grin.

"Huh!" he told himself, "things is shuah comin' 'Nopheles' way this time."

He dropped by his home and surprised Clarissy with his infectious good humor. "Still wantin' a automobile, honey?" he asked.

"Heap of good wantin' is gwine do me."

He chuckled inwardly; outwardly he appeared lugubrious.

"It's sho' a shame, hon, that you di'n't go ma'y Adam Shooks an' his ninety-hawss-power Conley-Detroit. Reckon you ain't love yo' husban' causen he's a piker, eh?"

"O-o-oh! 'Nopheles!" Clarissy hurled a contrite little body into his arms and volubly protested her undying affection.

Anopheles was exceedingly pleased with himself. He had long known that he was an astute business man, but this was the first time he had ever applauded himself in the rôle of schemer of schemes. And this one was a wonder.

"They ain't no git-away," he told himself. "It's as sho' as cullud chillun."

At four o'clock on the minute Mr. Adam Shooks appeared at Mr. Anopheles Ricketts' tailoring shop. He pressed upon Mr. Ricketts a ten-cent cigar. He quivered with nervous expectancy on the very edge of his chair and tried to read the face of his long and lanky vis-à-vis.

And finally he put the question direct: "Is you gwine loaned me that money, 'Nopheles, or ain't you is?"

Anopheles appeared to ponder seriously. "Ise consid'rin' it, Brother Shooks. Ordinary it woul'n't 'peal to me but considerin' we is soht of related, countin' I ma'ied the gal which you was engage' to, I is willin' to take the matter under devisement."

Adam threw his arms wide in a helpless, hopeless gesture. "Under devisement ain't gittin' me no cash money," he wailed. "An' that same is what I needs. If'n I don' raise it them folks

what I done bought the car offen is gwine take it away from me."

"You ain't say so?"

"Yeh, I does say so, an' I says it positive an' tho'ough."

Anopheles hesitated. This was his first hint that a failure to come to the financial aid of Mr. Adam Shooks would result in the loss of that gentleman's car. The temptation to sit back and see the fat little man stripped of his single claim to distinction was almost too great to be resisted.

But the hesitation was only momentary, though in its brief existence Adam Shooks died a thousand horrible deaths.

"How bouten it, 'Nopheles? Is it a go or ain't it?"

"We-e-ell, soht of."

"Soht of? What that kin' of talky-talk mean?"

"They's conditions."

"I grants 'em."

"You ain't heard 'em yet."

"I is gwine grant 'em, no matter what they is, previdin' I gits the money."

"It's this: Jes' gittin' a chattel mo'gage on yo' car ain't 'nough s'curity fo' a sedate an' instablished business man like what I is. I cain't ride in no chattel mo'gage—"

“But neither you don’ haf to buy no gasoline for it.”

“Buyin’ gasoline ain’t nothin’ ’tall to a man in my presition. Wha’s twen’y-six an’ a half cents to me a gallon?” He snapped bony fingers contemptuously. “Nothin’. Not nary nothin’ single thing a’tall. Tha’s what.”

“But—but you was reemahkin’—”

“—that mo’gages cain’t be rode in’ an’ automobiles can, an’ I was prospectin’—”

“—to hol’ my car fo’ yo’s’e’f ontill I is paid yo’ money?” Adam leaped furiously to his feet. “Lis’en heah at what I is sayin’, cullud man: When you says that you on’y goes to prove that you is foolish as you look. How you reckon I c’n wuk countin’ I ain’t got no automobile? Is you fo’got that I is in the taxi business an’ tha’s my taxi? Is you? Why, ‘Nopheles, I is plumb s’prised at the brains which you ain’t got. ’Thout my car I woul’n’t have no mo’ chance of makin’ a livin’ than what you would have if’n men stopped wearin’ pants.”

Anopheles put out a gently restraining hand. “Cumtrol yo’s’e’f, Brother Shooks; cumtrol yo’s’e’f. You is got too much voice fo’ the size of yo’ brain. When you opens yo’ mouth nothin’ comes out on’y foolishment. Brains—you nachelly ain’t got. I ain’t aimin’ to take yo’ car.” He hesitated. “That is on’y one day.”

“One day? Tha’s diff’ent.”

“You see, it’s thisaway, Brother Shooks: Ever sence Clarissy decided to ma’y a wuth-while man an’ tu’ned you down in favor of me she is been onhappy causen you is got a car an’ I ain’t. That jes’ shows you what a car c’n do. Think of her thinkin’ she could of been happy with a wuthless, no-’count man liken to you! Think of it! Ain’t it silly?”

Adam was pathetically anxious to be agreeable. “Ain’t it, now, Brother Ricketts. Ain’t it jes’?”

“An’ was thinkin’ an’ cogitatin’ mos’ long an’ voluptuously that if’n I was to loaned you this heah two hund’ed dollars I woul’d’t hol’ you up fo’ no ten puh cent intrus’ but on’y eight puh cent, but I is to borry that car from you from noon ontill eight o’clock one afternoon, an’ drive it my own se’f, an’—”

“But lis’en, Brother Ricketts; I is plumb opposed to lettin’ other folks run my car.”

“An’ you lis’en at me, also, Brother Shooks: I is plumb again’ lendin’ my money to niggers which ain’t wuth as much as nothin’. You knows yo’ own se’f that when I does business with you I is takin’ a bigger chance than what you is takin’ in lendin’ me yo’ car fo’ one measly afternoon. Ain’t it so now?”

One afternoon. Adam knew that Anopheles

was a good driver as drivers go, and the chances were all against anything happening to the car. And he needed that two hundred dollars; only Adam knew how he needed it, and only Adam realized that the husband of his ex-fiancée was his last chance.

“Which afternoon you want it?”

“Oh!” answered Anopheles with disarming nonchalance, “Saddy afternoon, I reckon.”

“Tha’ ’s my bes’ business day,” demurred Adam testily.

“You is doin’ mighty fine business when you borries two hund’ed dollars on the s’curity which you offers. Now look heah at this.” Anopheles probed into an inside pocket and produced a brown-backed formal document. “This heah is a contrac’ duly drawed up an’ created by Lawyer Evans Chew. He’s the bes’ cullud lawyer in Bummin’ham an’ drawin’ contrac’s is the fondes’ thing he’s of. This heah contrac’ says that I loands you two hund’ed dollars fo’ six months at eight puh cent intrus’, gits a mo’-gage on yo’ car as s’curity an’ fo’ fu’ther valu’ble cumsideration that there car is mine under a leasthol’ between noon Saddy an’ eight ’clock that night. Jes’ as much mine as ’tis yo’s now. An’ I is givin’ you prezac’ly ten minutes Brother Shooks, to sign it or tear it up!”

Adam read the verbose document carefully.

Then he glanced at the twenty new ten-dollar bills that Anopheles shoved tantalizingly under his nose. And—Adam signed!

Anopheles streaked down Eighteenth Street again in search of Florian Slappey. Within ten minutes he was found, and five minutes later Anopheles had signed an entry blank for the twenty-five-mile automobile race and deposited fifty dollars with Florian to guarantee his appearance.

“An’ I is makin’ you this one an’ on’y request, Brother Slappey, namely an’ as follows: That you don’ spill no wo’ds to anybody bouten me bein’ in the race. I is got pertickeler reasons why I wishes to keep it a secret until I rides onto the track with my racin’ car. Does you promise?”

Florian promised. He was so dazed that he would have promised anything once. Anopheles racing against four professional drivers! The idea was preposterous. Yet there was the signed entrance blank and the fifty dollars deposited as an appearance guaranty. There was no flying in the face of such evidence as that, and the dandified Florian gazed with new respect upon his tall brown friend.

“I wishes you luck, ’Nopheles; I sho’ly does wish you luck. As brother members of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, I hopes

you wins the race an' the five hund'ed dollars."

"Yo' hopes is well placed an' founded, Brother Slappey. Winnin' that race ain't gwine be nothin' on'y a little passin' away the time fo' me. But I pleads earnest with you, Brother Slappey, that you should remain it a secret."

Anopheles had accomplished much for one day; much, but not enough. Not quite enough. Anopheles was in an accomplishing mood and felt that he could not rest until every last detail was attended to. Thereupon he again sought Cap'n Kenney and the Rollins touring car. He handed to the white man one hundred dollars in cash. "Tha's to bin' the bargain which says I is gwine buy that Rollins towerin' car fo' six hund'ed dollars."

"I'm mighty glad, Anopheles. It's a good buy; car's in perfect condition. When will you have the other five hundred?"

"Saddy evenin' at six o'clock."

"Saturday evening?"

"Tha's it. I wan's you to drive that car out to the fair groun's, where they is gwine be a cullud automobile race. Ise gwine look you up there, an' I'll have five hund'ed mo' dollars in my han' to swap with you fo' that Rollins."

“Where are you going to get the other five hundred?”

“Don’ you go worryin’ yo’ haid, Cap’n Kenney, bouten that other five hund’ed. Gittin’ that money is the on’y thing which ain’t worryin’ me none a-tall.”

Anopheles left the garage with a receipt in his pocket, a smile on his long face and supreme happiness in his heart. He envisioned himself driving regally up to the gate of the neat little cottage occupied by himself and Clarissy, the Rollins glittering in the sunlight; driving up and presenting the car to Clarissy. There and then, he knew, Mr. Adam Shooks would fade into pale and gloomy insignificance for all his ninety-horse-power Conley-Detroit. Even Clarissy would agree that such a car as the Rollins was enough automobile for any sane mortal.

Anopheles was very much tickled with himself. There wasn’t a detail overlooked, not a flaw in his scheme.

At noon Saturday he intended going to Adam and claiming the Conley-Detroit. For an hour he would drive it by way of familiarizing himself with the way it handled, and for an hour after that he and Cass Driggers would shoot heavy oil into the big bearings and choke the grease cups. Then a trip to a filling station for

a tankful of gasoline, a dose of oil in the crank case, an inspection of tire inflation—and the fair grounds.

The race itself held no worries at all for the amateur driver. He knew that the best of the four professionals entered had never bettered sixty miles an hour over the twenty-five-mile route, and he knew that his car would do ninety. It was as plain as the four-three on a pair of loaded dice. When they had traveled nineteen miles he'd be across the finish line. It never occurred to him that any special skill was required in the handling of a racing automobile. He merely looked on the race as a question of relative speed and took it for granted that the reason the professionals had never done more than sixty miles was because their cars didn't have that much speed in their make-ups.

And so it narrowed down to a matter of simple arithmetic: Ninety miles was thirty miles faster than sixty. That made the race mere child's play. He couldn't help grinning to himself as he bethought him of the chagrin of the professional drivers; of the wildly applauding crowd in the grand stand; of the adulation that would be his; of the judge's flowery speech to the winner and the handing over of the five hundred dollars prize money—and then his possession of the coveted Rollins touring car.

He would be a hero, an automobile owner, a much happier husband and a man of distinct accomplishments—surely no mean attainment.

His demeanor at home was a triumph in histrionic art. He openly envied Adam Shooks and mourned the fact that he didn't know when—or if—he could afford an automobile. He fanned the flame of his wife's automotive desire into a white heat. Not once did he hint of the colossal deal afoot, not a single word did he drop to apprise her of the social glories in store. The Rollins was to be a stupendous surprise. Meanwhile, he allowed her to plumb the nethermost depths of misery and thwarted desire before raising her to the pinnacle of delight with his gift.

She hinted that Mr. Shooks would take her to ride when she so desired it, and her husband did not negative the idea. That rather piqued her vanity; she would have preferred that he had railed against it. Then she could have quarreled satisfactorily and thus had an excuse for doing it. It wasn't that she didn't love Anopheles passionately; but she did want an automobile so very, very much.

On Friday morning something occurred which caused Anopheles Ricketts considerable perturbation. It was in the form of a letter

from a newly formed lodge in Calera; a letter which invited Anopheles to attend the meeting of the lodge that night and measure the thirty members of the drill team for uniforms. The account totaled nearly nine hundred dollars, five hundred of which was to be spot cash in advance; the balance payable upon delivery of the uniforms.

Anopheles reflected. He could get down on the train that afternoon, attend the meeting at night, take the measurements of his victims, spend the night in Calera and return on the train due in Birmingham at eleven-fifty A. M. He knew that the train was seldom late; it was a fast train north-bound from New Orleans to Cincinnati, and only a half day out of New Orleans. True, Anopheles hated to take the risk, but on the other hand he was too keen a business man to pass up such an opportunity. There was a full four hundred dollars profit to him in the deal.

He went. He bade his bride a long and lingering farewell, and gave her to understand that he would not return until the Saturday-night train—which allowed a late noonday arrival in Birmingham and an immediate trip to the racetrack without going home to greet Clarissy.

He sought Adam Shooks and impressed upon that mortgaged gentleman the necessity of hav-

ing his car parked before the Penny Prudential Bank Building at noon.

“Causen betwix that time an’ eight o’clock it’s mine, Adam.”

“If’n you ain’t gwine be heah—”

“I is. An’ if’n I ain’t that don’t concern you none. The car’s mine fo’ them eight hours, an’ I’ll thank you to act according.”

At four o’clock that afternoon Anopheles boarded the Montgomery train for Calera. At five o’clock Mr. Adam Shooks happened to drift into Bud Peaglar’s Barbecue Lunch Room and Billiard Parlor and was inveigled into a game of eight-ball with Mr. Florian Slappey—two bits a game.

Florian won four consecutive games and Florian found himself in an exceedingly good humor. More: It was a fault of Florian’s that when in a good humor he had to talk, and automobiles was a perfectly natural subject when in the company of the taxicabbing Adam Shooks. So Florian gave voice to something that had been puzzling him considerably of late.

Said he: “What soht of a automobile driver is Brother ’Nopheles Ricketts?”

“What you means—driver?”

“Automobile driver.”

Adam Shooks shrugged. “He’d better by a dawg-gawn sight be a good driver. He’s done

gawn an' got pressession of my car f'um noon ontill eight o'clock t'-morry night."

"Yo' car?"

"Yeah!"

"Not that big ninety-hawss-power Conley-Detroit?"

"Not is wrong. Is is right."

Florian tapped the table rail lightly with the tip of his cue. "Some men is jes' nachelly bawn unlucky."

Mr. Shooks was aware that the remark of Mr. Slappey had a distinctly personal flavor. "Which men you reemahks about, Mistuh Slappey?"

"I ain't mentionin' no names a-tall," reneged Florian. "N'r neither I ain't vi-latin' no confidence bouten that race out to the fair grounds t'-morry which they is a five hund'ed dollars prize fo'."

The game ceased. It ceased suddenly and completely. Putting two and two together was one of the best things that Adam Shooks did.

"Gosh a'mighty livin' tripe!" he ejaculated. "Does you mean to stan' yonder an' tell me that 'Nopheles is figgerin' on drivin' my car in that they sweepstakes race?"

"I ain't tellin' you nothin', an' fu'thermo' I ain't gwine tell you nothin'. I done promise' 'Nopheles I woul'n't."

Adam's cue clattered miserably to the floor. Cold beads of perspiration stood out upon the cigar-hued brow of Mr. Shooks.

"I might of knowed it," he wailed. "I sho' would of knowed it if'n I had of had mo' sense'n a crippled fiddler crab. 'Nopheles enterin' my car in that race 'gainst them preffessional drivers. Time he runs it twicet 'roun' that co'se they ain't gwine be nothin' lef' of it on'y the smell from the gas tank." Mr. Shooks' anger was mounting. His voice crescendoed to a shrill furious wail. "He ain't gwine do it. Brother Slappey! He jes' nachelly ain't! Tha's all what I is tellin' you. He ain't gwine git my car!" He grabbed his hat and clapped it on his head. "G-by, Mistuh Slappey. Heah is where actions begins to happen."

"Where you is gwine?" called Florian after the fleeing figure.

Adam answered from the door without turning his head. "Ise headed fo' Lawyer Evans Chew. He done drawed that contrac', an' if'n a lawyer cain't break a contrac' he drawed his own se'f, then he's a bum lawyer."

But Lawyer Chew couldn't. He listened patiently to Mr. Shooks' epic denunciation of Mr. Ricketts. Then he shook his head with sad and final solemnity.

"I is exceeding' an' pow'ful sorry, Mistuh

Shooks; an' if'n I had of knowed that you would be so inclined as to bust this heah contrac' I could have drawed it bustable. But I wa'n't fo'wa'ned, an' hence wa'n't fo'armed. That car which is you'n b'longs to Brother Ricketts from noon ontill eight o'clock t'-morry night. He can do with it as he wishes, as made an' provided in said contrac' an' indenture duly drafted by an' betwix pahties of fust an' secon' paht, fo' mutual an' vallible cumsideration, an' witnessed in proper form. An' they ain't no testimony 'lowed, 'cordin' to the rules of evidence an' the stachutes of this noble an' sove'eign State of Alabama, to be intraduced to modify or amend or otherwise change the terms of a written document, an' again an' to continue—"

"I gathers," interrupted Mr. Shooks slowly, "that what you is tryin' to tell me is that I is in the soup. That it?"

"To descind to the ve-nacular—you have said it."

Mr. Shooks rose. He was in no mood to be tactful. "Yeh, an' I is about to said one mo' thing—namely an' as follows: You is one hell of a rotten lawyer!"

The beatitude of Mr. Adam Shooks had suddenly gone flooey. The smile left his usually cheerful face, a sag had come to his shoulders.

He felt himself alone and deserted in a cold and cruel world.

He made his way down the street and came at length to his car, parked head in to the curb. For perhaps five minutes he stood regarding the faithful vehicle which had for more than a year kept good clothes upon his back and given directorial dimensions to his mezzanine landing.

His attitude was that of a husband called in to say a final farewell to a departing wife. Tomorrow night his beloved Conley-Detroit would be prey to the junkman, leaving as heritage only a basis for action at law against Anopheles Ricketts. Mr. Shooks climbed sorrowfully into the driver's seat, pressed the starter button, let in his gears, backed carefully away from the curb and headed southward toward the crest of Red Mountain.

The sun blazed brilliantly overhead, birds chirped merrily in the trees, the motor purred gently; everywhere there was optimistic life and blatant bliss. But not for Adam Shooks. A great clammy gob of gloom had descended upon him.

Mr. Shooks was up against it—hard. The agonies of the world had allied and declared war upon him. And there was nothing he could do to avert the disaster. Nothing. Not a sin-

gle thing. He clenched his fist and slammed it against the wheel.

“They ain’t never been nothin’ in the world yet,” he sizzled in self-encouragement, “which ain’t got sumthin’ to keep it from bein’ as bad as what it seems like it is. They ain’t—”

He ceased soliloquizing. He remained ceased. His lips pressed together in a straight brown line. Mr. Shooks was having an idea!

It wasn’t much of an idea at first, but as he drove over Red Mountain and dropped through Rosedale, only to travel a few miles farther and mount the acclivity which marks Shades Mountain, the details of a good scheme took shape from a dull gray background and became shot through with golden hues.

One hour later Mr. Shooks depressed both pedals, slipped his gears into neutral, clamped on the emergency brake, lay back in his seat and smiled.

“It’s a long chance,” he muttered. “But it sho’ly ought to wuk so’s Mistuh ’Nopheles Ricketts won’t bother me no mo’.”

And that evening Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts had a caller. She came to the gate to meet the smiling and overdressed Adam Shooks who posed regally at the wheel of a freshly polished Conley-Detroit. Mr. Shooks was at his social best.

“Evenin’, Missis Ricketts.”

“Same to you, Mistuh Shooks. Is you aimin’ to come in fo’ a minute?”

“Now that you mentions it, Missis Ricketts, I don’ hahdly think I was. What I wants to ast you is: Where is Mistuh Ricketts at?”

“He’s down to Calera. Why?”

Adam chk’d with well-simulated disappointment. “Ain’t that too bad, now? Ain’t it, jes’?”

“How come that too-bad business?”

“ ’Tis thisaway, Missis Ricketts: T’-morry mawnin’ was a soht of an extry day with me an’ I was figgerin’ on comin’ roun’ heah in the mawnin’ with Lithia Blevins an’ takin’ you an’ Mistuh Ricketts fo’ a nice long ride down the Mon’gom’ry highway. An’ then, Missis Ricketts, when I got you out there where they wa’n’t no traffic I was gwine let you take the wheel while I taught you how to drive—seein’ as you is always said as you wanted—”

“You—you was gwine teach me to drive t’-morry mawnin’?”

“Suttinly.”

“An Lithia Blevins is gwine be with us fo’ chaperon?”

“Tha’s where you spoke a armful.”

Clarissy Ricketts hesitated—and was lost. Better women than Clarissy have succumbed to

a lesser lure. And Clarissy vindicated the proposed indiscretion in advance by recalling the words of her husband: "You c'n go ridin' with Adam Shooks whenever you wishes." Clarissy wished.

And the appointment was made for the following morning at ten o'clock.

That night Clarissy was atremble with anticipation. She was to get her first driving lesson, and Adam had promised to return her home safely by noon, the earliest possible hour at which Anopheles could return from Calera. It was to mark an epoch in the life of Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts, and if she entertained any doubts as to the propriety of joyriding with a former and rather recent fiancé the doubts were stilled in the surge of desire.

As for Adam Shooks, he was enjoying hugely the contemplation of the morrow. The reaction from the misery of a few hours ago was most pleasing. And Adam was more than a little proud of the scheme he had evolved—right out of his own head. Easy, just like that.

In the first place he had no intention whatever of taking Lithia Blevins. He would call for Clarissy, explain that Lithia was indisposed, and take a chance on Clarissy's passion for automobiles proving stronger than her sense of discretion.

Then he would speed out of Birmingham and head southward in the general direction of Montgomery, where the roads were in fairly good condition and the scenery beautiful. For fifteen or twenty miles he would drive serenely; then something was scheduled to go wrong with the car. And then something else. Mrs. Clarissy Ricketts would be treated to imaginary mishap after imaginary mishap. Noon would come and go. He knew just where they would be when the hunger pangs began to come: A little roadhouse for colored folks—the odor of fried chicken and rice with cowpeas, the whole to be topped off by red, cold, juicy watermelon. And then he would repair his car by four or five o'clock and return to Birmingham.

Anopheles Ricketts would be awaiting him. Anopheles would be furious and filled with threats of legal action against Adam. But the big race would have been run without the presence of the Conley-Detroit, and Anopheles' hands would be tied through fear of the scandal that would inevitably attach to the fair name of his beloved bride should the affair be bruited about.

So Adam schemed; and so, for a time at any rate, the scheme worked. True, Clarissy demurred even more than Adam had anticipated over an unchaperoned joyride, but she gave in

when he promised faithfully to return her by eleven-thirty—or sooner, if she so requested. And fourteen miles outside of Birmingham Adam surreptitiously snapped off the ignition switch. The car gasped, quivered and stopped.

“Huh!” grunted Adam. “Sumthin’ mus’ be wrong.”

Clarissy was undisturbed. She watched him alight, raise the hood, gaze earnestly at the motor and shake his head.

“Nothin’ impawtant, is it?” she asked from the depths of her motor ignorance.

“Dunno,” he answered sententiously. “I ain’t hahdly know. Seems like they is sumthin’ wrong with the accelerator.”

An accelerator more or less was nothing in Clarissy’s young life and she waited patiently while Adam went through the motions of repairing something. She entertained not even a hint of suspicion that Adam was tricking her, not even when he at length climbed back in the car, flipped the ignition contact, pressed the starter button and shot ahead.

Four miles farther on the performance was repeated. Adam leaped to the ground in feigned anger and gave vent to an impressive motorist’s oath.

“I’m dawg’d if’n ’tain’t that rotten ol’ accelerator again. I swanny!”

This time Clarissy took an interest in the affair. "Is the accelerator sumthin' impawtant, Mistuh Shooks?"

He gazed frowningly upon her. "'Pawtant? 'Pawtant, you asts me? Well, I sh'd say it wa'n't no mo' impawtant than what a weddin' ring is to a ma'ied couple."

"C'n you fix it?"

He stepped back from the car, hands on hips, and surveyed the motor intently.

"I dunno. Accelerators is pow'ful contrary things. I is knowed balky accelerators which has wrecked cars an' killed all the folks which was ridin' in 'em. Accelerators is sumthin' which has to be treated gentle an' knowin'. Ise afraid we is in fo' a bad time, Missis Ricketts."

"You—you don' mean we is gwine be delayed out heah in the woods?"

"How I sh'd know that? I ain't inside that accelerator, is I?"

Clarissy grew nervous. She grew very nervous; so nervous that she alighted and paced the ground while he pretended to fix something. And Adam was acting his rôle well. He had raised the seat and strewn fearful-looking tools all over the roadside. And every once in a while as he caught a glimpse of Clarissy's worried face he had to bend his head to conceal the smile which persisted in breaking forth.

At twenty-five minutes before noon Adam started his motor purring. He shoved his tools under the front seat, bundled Clarissy into the car, headed back toward Birmingham and fed the gas in large and juicy quantities. A half mile rolled under their wheels; three-quarters; a mile. A roadhouse appeared on the right; Adam's left hand crept out toward the ignition switch, snapped it off and withdrew, unnoticed. The car quivered and halted as Adam applied the brakes—profanely.

A pained and hopeless wail issued from between Clarissy's lips: "O-o-o-oh! Ise bettin' it's that horrid ol' acceleration again!"

Adam gloomily made it unanimous. "Accelerator is right, Missis Ricketts; an' this time she's busted sho' nuff."

He stepped to the ground, raised the hood and affected grief as he inspected the perfect motor. It was too good to be true: Marooned in the woods with Anopheles' wife, and that gentleman waiting in Birmingham for the car that wasn't going to be there.

Clarissy was not enjoying herself. She was learning rapidly that cars have more to them than riding qualities. And she was particularly bitter against accelerators. She hadn't the least idea what they were, but she knew that she

wished this particular car had been constructed without one.

And as Adam pretended to work he gave her a lesson on the temperamental qualities of accelerators. By the time he finished she was almost in tears.

More, she was hungry—very, horribly hungry. Which was why she made so little objection when he discovered that the house across the road was a roadhouse and insisted that she eat a bit of lunch with him.

“Bein’ out with a busted accelerator is bad enough,” he argued, “but an empty stummick ain’t gwine he’p it none.”

And so she joined him. They entered the dining room of the roadhouse at twenty minutes after twelve—she, worried, gloomy, despondent; he, sad without and exultant within.

Meanwhile things of moment had been happening in Calera and along the main line of the L. & N. railroad. Even Anopheles Ricketts was finding himself not without trouble.

He had risen shortly after eight o’clock and breakfasted heartily in view of the day of triumph now at hand. He checked off on his time-table the scheduled arrival hour of the northbound L. & N., dropped in for a chat with a couple of the lodge members whose physical dimensions were down in his order book, and

finally, a full half hour before train time, made his way to the depot. He addressed the station agent:

“How that nawthboun’ L’n’N runnin’, cap’n?”

The railroad man smiled. “Three hours late already; and getting one minute later every sixty seconds.”

“Uh!” Anopheles felt his long legs quivering. “Huh? What that you reemahks, cap’n?”

“Wreck on the main line—freight derailed. There’s no tellin’ when she’ll come through.”

“Livin’ lizards! What I is gwine do? ‘Nopheles Ricketts: You is astin’ yo’s’e’f what you is gwine do!”

Apparently there was no answer. The main line of the railroad was blocked by a nasty freight wreck, Anopheles Ricketts was thirty-some miles from Birmingham and the race was scheduled to be run that afternoon. And all that Anopheles had to do to lose his fifty dollars deposit was to fail to put in appearance at starting time.

The solution of the problem was as expensive as it was simple. Twenty minutes after the news of the wreck had staggered the lean and hungry-looking tailor from Birmingham he was seated beside the owner of a flivver and they were burning up the road in a northerly direction.

It was good training for the nerves of the would-be Barney Oldfield. The little car shook, rattled and rolled; it careened wildly and slithered from one side of the road to the other. Anopheles sat impatiently, hunched forward in the front seat, eyes focused straight to the front as though to bring Birmingham nearer.

The car slewed suddenly and missed a deep gully by a hair. It shot by a Montgomery-bound truck—shaving the mammoth vehicle so closely that the driver thereof howled profanity after them. It dropped down a precipitous hill at lightning speed and narrowly avoided a freight train at the bottom. But still Anopheles was not satisfied.

He turned a fixed set face to the driver, and made a single acid remark: “My gosh golly, man! You does drive slow!”

The wheels were humming over the gravel road, the radiator was steaming, the floor became hot to the touch, even through shoes. Anopheles critically inspected the gas arc.

“Lis’en heah, cullud man: Ain’t it noways possible fo’ you to make a li’l speed?”

The driver was game. He shoved his gas ahead and the car trembled from hood to differential. It rose on its hind legs and danced. It ate up the miles with speed never contem-

plated in the factory of its nativity. And then—

Well, if there hadn't been a storm the week before it never would have occurred, because the storm had blown down a telephone pole which occupied more than half the road. And the first thing either Anopheles or the driver knew of it came when the bow of the flivver shot skyward, the car itself jolted nastily and flirted into the ditch and there lay peacefully on its side. The motor gave a single consumptive cough, kicked despairingly and expired, game to the last.

Anopheles lifted himself from a distinctly sitting posture in the cotton field. He made a casual inspection and found that he was pretty much all present. Then he gazed resentfully at his driver.

"I done knowed sumthin' was gwine nappen," he remarked testily.

He rose and dusted his trousers. Then he found a mile post and read its figures: "19 mi. to B'ham." He waved a casual farewell to the driver of the ex-car and started hoofing it for the Alabama metropolis.

"See you anonymous," he called cheerily. "I is got a 'gagement to the Bummin'ham Fair Groun's at th'ee-thutty sha'p."

Anopheles was constructed along walking lines, and he now proceeded to excel Nature's

intentions. His long legs spanned unbelievable spaces of road; narrow skinny body bent into the wind, head jerking with each step in much the manner of a walking chicken. He mounted a long hill, passed over the crest and descended at top speed. Every once in a while he glanced over his shoulder, hoping against hope that some Birmingham-bound automobile would come along and sell him a ride to his destination.

Suddenly he paused. His eyes focused on a certain object. They remained focused. So did Anopheles. The object of his gaze was a big red Conley-Detroit car parked by the side of the road opposite a neat little building which Anopheles knew as a roadhouse.

"If I di'n't know better," mused Anopheles, "I'd swear that was Adam Shooks' car."

Curiosity drew him closer. His eyes opened wider. He saw a familiar dent in the left rear fender. He seemed to recognize the right front tire. He proceeded to inspect the car.

"Hm! Looks like Adam's car. Same model as Adam's car. Same color as Adam's car. Same bent fender like what Adam's car is got." He raised the hood tentatively. "Same number as Adam's car." He stepped back and passed a bewildered hand across his forehead. "Jump-in' jiminy! It is Adam's car!"

It took Anopheles Ricketts just three minutes

to comprehend fully this providential stroke of luck. And then realization of the fact that Adam Shooks had tried to put something across on him struck home. He saw the whole thing plainly now: Somehow Adam had learned that Anopheles intended to race with the big Conley-Detroit and had played safe by bringing the car from the city so that it could not be used in the race, and after that— Well, Adam Shooks was notorious for having few worries about the future.

Anopheles glared belligerently at the roadhouse. He impulsively started toward it, intending to have it out with Adam then and there; to confront the man with his perfidy and— Then another idea came to the lanky one and he turned back. Which is why he missed seeing Adam bending over a snowy table explaining earnestly to an exceedingly worried Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts that accelerators were extremely contrary things, but that he would be sure to fix his up and return her to Birmingham in plenty of time to save her social face.

Outside Anopheles worked fast and definitely. His watch showed a trifle past one o'clock. The Conley-Detroit was unlocked. Anopheles climbed in, snapped on the switch, made sure that the cutout was not, pressed the starter button and smiled responsively as the rhythmic

thrum of the motor was wafted to his ears. He slid the gears in gently and the car rolled away, accelerating prettily as it mounted the gentle acclivity beyond the roadhouse.

The situation tickled the risibilities of Mr. Anopheles Ricketts. He laughed to himself at the mental picture of Adam Shooks when Adam found himself carless. Mr. Shooks was about to get his just deserts. He had attempted to doublecross Anopheles, and had been hoist by the petard of his own scheming. Anopheles was bulwarked behind his ironclad contract—the contract which leased the car to him between noon and eight o'clock of this day. The fact that he had found the car on the road made no neverminds; it was his and he had it.

He lolled back in his seat and gave himself over to the intense enjoyment of the moment. Once safely out of earshot of the exclusive colored roadhouse he cut out the muffler and grinned happily as the motor roared evenly on all cylinders. He depressed the accelerator as he swung into an even straight stretch of road and watched the speedometer indicator climb to sixty, hang there, then go up two miles. The speed rather took his breath away and he slowed down.

“But anyways,” he gasped, “they ain’t no doubt that she’ll do it.”

And just as Anopheles stopped his Conley-Detroit at the Five Points filling station in Birmingham and replenished his stock of oil and gas Mr. Adam Shooks and Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts sauntered from the roadhouse eighteen miles away. Adam was talking.

"I is been studyin' bouten that they accelerator, Missis Ricketts, an' I is came to the c'nclusion that I knows jes' what is the matter an' how it c'n be fixed. Of co'se accelerators is plumb bad things to git out of o'der on a car."

"Yeh," she retorted bitterly. "B'lieve me, I knows it!"

"But when a man is a swell mechanic liken to what I is—"

Adam raised his eyes to the car. Then he blinked. The car wasn't. Adam's jaw sagged. Clarissy took in the situation at a glance and let forth a wild wail.

"Oh, Lawsy!" she howled. "Befo' lunch I knowed ev'ythin' in the wo'ld had went wrong. Now I knows what was befo' ain't nothin' to what is now."

Adam was stunned. For the first time he was helpless, supine. Clarissy swung on him and proceeded to express the opinion of his personality which had been crystallizing for the past two hours. Her language was pointed and picturesque. Adam withered before the verbal

storm. He shook like a bowl of jelly, lips parted, arms hanging helplessly at his side.

And finally Clarissy set her teeth and started up the road. "C'mon, Adam."

"Where you is gwine, Missis Ricketts?"

"Home."

"How?"

"Walk!"

"It's eighteen miles."

"I is gwine walk it, Mistuh Shooks, an' you is gwine walk with me. An' if'n you don' sumbody is gwine fin' a cullud co'pse on this heah road t'-morry mawnin' an' it's gwine answer to the name of Adam Shooks!"

Adam walked!

The enormous grand stand at the state fair grounds was jammed with a crush of humanity, chocolate in hue. The place was a riot of vivid color and seethed with excitement. Already the minor races had been run and the virus was in the blood of the spectators. They were thirsting for long-distance excitement and on their toes for the commencement of the twenty-five-mile race.

Out on the infield there was considerable excitement.

Officials were summoned hurriedly and the four professional drivers addressed themselves

voluminously to Florian Slappey, chairman of the Magic City Automobile Fast Racing Association.

"We ain't no fools," howled one individual, "to go git out there on that dirt track with a feller which ain't never even drove a race befo'."

Florian's official lips curled in a sneer.

"I ain't worryin' my haid bouten what you is gwine do an' what you ain't gwine do. Come time fo' the race to staht an' you ain't on the line you loses each the fifty dollars entrinnee fee an' don' git you no expense money."

One of them—a tall, broad-shouldered negro—clutched Florian by the arm.

"But you don' on'erstan', Mistuh Slappey. That long lean feller with the Conley-Detroit, he don' know nothin' 'bout race drivin'. He's gwine swing wide on one tu'n an' sho't on another, an' fust thing you know they is gwine be one gran' bust-up."

"You is all signed releases, quittin' us of responsibility if'n anybody gets kilt," retorted Florian practically; "an' the crowd loves a smash-up. Huh! Fo' prefessionals skeered of a amachure."

"Tha's it prezac'ly. If'n the man knowed anythin' 'bout drivin' in a race it woul'n't make no diff'ence. But we ain't gwine be able to do

nothin' with him on the turns. He ain't gwine know when he's beat, an' they's shuah to be a accident."

"You is jes' on'y wo'ied that he's gwine beat you-all. Tha's all what is the matter with you. All I is got to say, I hopes he wins the prize, an' the fust man which fouls him gits kicked offen the track. Tha's all, gen'lemun. You c'n use yo' own judgment."

He turned toward the Conley-Detroit. Anopheles had just filled and tightened his last grease cup and stood back proudly surveying the car which was to drive him to victory and ownership of the coveted Rollins touring car. He had long since spotted the automobile dealer at one end of the field, waiting true to his promise, with the car which Anopheles was to pay for immediately the prize money was handed over.

Anopheles' confidence was sublime. It multiplied when Florian told him chuckingly of the conference with the four professional drivers.

"They is jes' on'y skeered that you is gwine beat 'em, 'Nopheles; an' I hopes you does."

"They ain't no doubt of it," came the bland answer. "They ain't never drove no faster'n sixty miles an' this heah car is guaranteed to do ninety."

News of Anopheles' entry swept through the

stands. Excitement increased a hundredfold. Anopheles became a hero. Men who knew something of the game shook their heads; they had an idea of what Anopheles' ignorance had put him up against.

As for the quartet of professional drivers, they were petrified with fear. Excellent men though they were, they knew enough to know when danger was real, and they had no mind to run a real race against a scatter-brained amateur. They had no fear that Anopheles would win, but they were afraid that he would cause two or three nasty accidents. And they had no desire for casualties.

“Trouble with a ignorant nigger like him,” vouchsafed one, “is that if’n one of us takes a turn safe an’ wide, he’s jest as li’ble as not to bust in betwix’ us an’ the fence, an’ then they’s gwine be a heap of automobile gwine to the other wo’ld.”

The five drivers were called together by Florian. It was agreed that the racers were to start ten seconds apart, and the drivers rolled high dice for the honor. Anopheles rolled last. Three dice, and he had a fifteen to beat. His long bony fingers wrapped round the ivories, clicked them fondly and spun them on to the ground. Three symmetrical sixes stared up at them. Anopheles laughed aloud.

“Eighteen! I stahts fust. Reckon this is sho’ nuff my lucky day!”

The cars lined up, Anopheles and his red Conley-Detroit at the rail. He carried no mechanician, and his sole equipment consisted of a pair of ten-cent goggles some kind friend had loaned. He started his motor and hunched down in his seat, gears in low, ears alert for the starter’s gun, which was to sign the flagman to drop his signal. At Anopheles’ right were the four professionals in their wicked-looking racers, motors roaring.

The stands were in a furore. Only Anopheles, of the thousands, was calm and unruffled. He was already envisioning his triumph: The chagrin of the professional drivers, the joy of his wife when he should drive home with his new secondhand Rollins touring car.

The pop of a revolver sounded above the engine din. The assistant starter flipped his flag. The stands howled. Instinctively Anopheles clamped down on his accelerator and let the clutch pedal back with a jerk. The car quivered and leaped ahead. Anopheles slipped from low into high. He was at the first turn before he knew it, and shot wildly round, just grazing the outside fence. The second starter, just under roaring way, cursed as he saw and understood Anopheles’ clumsiness.

The Conley-Detroit straightened out on the back stretch, and Anopheles fed her the juice. She seemed to leap from under him. He was at the turn; his foot came off the accelerator, the car turned on two wheels, veered wildly, righted itself, kicked up a horrible cloud of dust, shot straight for the inner fence, jerked away and was in the home stretch. As it shot by the grand stand the long driver heard a wild yell of acclaim, but this time he slowed down at the curve on the lower end and took it more discreetly. He was beginning to get his bearings and to understand that there was considerably more to driving a high-powered car on a one-mile dirt track than he had fancied.

In his ears was a sinister roaring and he became vaguely conscious that it was from a motor other than his. He glanced at his speedometer; he knew that he was making at least seventy-five miles an hour. The speedometer registered forty-six.

“Dawg-gawn it!” muttered Anopheles. “It’s done gawn an’ got out of order!”

The roar of the pursuing motor came closer and closer. Anopheles couldn’t understand it. His car was a good ten miles faster than that of any other car on the track and he had the lead. It was a simple matter of mathematics with him. That lead could and should be held.

The driver of the second car was crowding close, intending to cut in between Anopheles and the fence when the former swung wide on the turn, and then to shoot into a safe lead on the stretch.

His plan worked—partly. Anopheles took his turn wide; so wide that the fence loomed up straight ahead of him. It looked like a brick wall. Anopheles gave a wild yell and slung his steering wheel over. The big car quivered, heaved, bucked, doubled, and sped straight as a bullet for the inner fence.

The driver of the second car had just put on speed to get by. He heard a shriek from his mechanic and saw Anopheles' roaring machine shooting across his track. Terror gripped at his heart. He clamped on the brakes, slewed violently to the right, missing the rear of the Conley-Detroit by a fraction of an inch, and was rewarded with a loud and stinging plop!

At the same instant the third car, which had been hanging close on the heels of the second, attempted to cut across on the far side. The unexpected maneuver of the second car threw a wrench into the driver's intentions and he cracked to the left. Two of his tires refused the strain and followed the despairing course of the one on the second car.

Meanwhile Anopheles reached the inner

fence, muscled down on his steering wheel once more and by another miracle found himself headed straight down the stretch. He hunched over his wheel like a great buzzard and sirened triumphantly by the grand stand at a forty-two-mile gait, a half lap leader over the two other cars.

For three more laps Anopheles held a safe lead. The second car donned a new tire and started out again. The drivers of the two cars still seriously in the running held grimly to the flanks of the Conley-Detroit, chafing at the slow pace, but having learned a lesson from the near-smashups of the others. Their idea was to wait until the pace grew hopelessly slow, then, when they had Anopheles taking his turns on the fence, to shoot wide at a fifty-mile gait and pass him.

The end of the tenth mile found the relative positions unchanged. The car with the two gone tires had withdrawn ungracefully. Anopheles was bubbling with confidence. The pace had degenerated to forty miles. Anopheles' wild driving had broken up the surface of the track and it was a solid cloud of dust. The spectators were in a frenzy.

On the eleventh lap the driver of the car immediately behind Anopheles saw his chance. The Conley-Detroit negotiated the turn close

and carefully. And suddenly Anopheles heard a screaming horn, a wildly roaring motor.

His right foot went down. So did the accelerator. The Conley-Detroit jumped forward like a crazy thing, zigzagging across the bows of the other car.

The professional driver saw his danger. Anopheles saw it but didn't recognize. All he knew was that he held the lead and must continue to hold it. So he didn't see the professional bang his rear wheel against the fence and pile his car up by the side of the track. Anopheles merely heard a crash, and when he came round again saw the wrecked car with the driver and mechanic sitting gloomily and unhurt beside it. Anopheles' lips curled into a sneer.

"Professional—huh? Them fellers ain't no drivers a-tall!"

Anopheles was as calm as a spring oyster. He accelerated gently to forty-seven, and held her there. Two cars were out of the race altogether; the other two had taken to heart the lesson he had taught. Neither driver had any intention whatever of attempting to pass the lanky amateur. They were content to hang on, hoping against hope that something would happen to the Conley-Detroit, that something would break; a tire blow out.

Twenty-one miles; twenty-two; twenty-three. On the twenty-fourth lap the second man made a last desperate attempt to pass Anopheles on the stretch. The roar of his motor was the signal for Anopheles. He shot ahead and took the turn on two wheels. The professional gave it up as a hopeless job.

The last lap started with the professional close and the maniacal crowd on its feet, yelling deliriously. Anopheles bent forward and fed the gas. The speedometer climbed to fifty-three—fifty-four. The other car held close, praying for a last-minute accident.

It failed to come. Anopheles shot across the line an easy winner!

But he didn't know that he had won. Not until he had circled the track thrice more did he realize that the other cars had quit and the race was at an end. He halted his car and dismounted. Hundreds gathered about him, shouting congratulations. Anopheles smiled in superior fashion.

"Huh!" he said. "That ain't near as hahd as the tailorin' business!"

And then the cash prize of five hundred dollars was handed to the victor amid tumultuous applause. Finally Anopheles broke away. He headed across the field toward Captain Kenney and the waiting Rollins touring car. And he

passed the quartet of professional drivers. They glowered at him menacingly.

Anopheles paused. He placed hands on skinny hips.

“Cullud men,” he remarked genially, “what you know bouten automobiles—ain’t!”

Then he passed on, five hundred dollars in hand in addition to his returned fifty dollars entrance fee. The fifty he pocketed and the five hundred he handed to Captain Kenney. That gentleman looked wonderingly upon his colored friend.

“Anopheles,” he advised sagely, “I would suggest that you insure this car immediately; very immediately!”

At half past five o’clock a weary and foot-sore couple dragged leaden feet down Twentieth Street, turned into Avenue F and paused.

Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts was all in. She was a little more than all in. Every muscle in her body ached. She turned pained eyes upon Mr. Adam Shooks.

“If’n you ever comes within a hund’ed miles of me ag’in, Mistuh Shooks,” said she, “you is gwine to be ain’t. G’-by!”

Adam had long since lost strength for a retort. He dragged heavy feet behind him and stumbled down the street toward his own home.

"Eighteen miles," he groaned. "Oh, lawsy! Eighteen miles with a talkin' woman!"

Clarissy reached the veranda and collapsed into a wicker chair. Her head sank back and her eyes closed in an excess of agony.

She didn't even bother to investigate as to whether Anopheles had returned. She was suffering too much to care one way or the other.

Suddenly from up the street there came to her ears the triumphant honking of an automobile horn. It was steady and insistent, almost hypnotic. She raised heavy, tired eyes and gazed.

The glittering, newly painted car rolled proudly down the street—a fine Rollins touring car. She finally sensed that the man at the wheel was her husband. She groaned and turned over in her chair. Her eyes closed again.

He was out of the car and beside her in the twinkling of an eye, too full of news about his gift to give heed to her bedraggled condition.

"Honey!"

"Yeh?"

"Look what I is bought fo' you."

"What?"

"A fine new secon'han' Rollins towerin' car!"

"O-o-oh!"

It was not the sort of ejaculation he had anti-

cipated. He bent tenderly above her chair. "I reckon Adam Shooks won't never—"

Her hands clenched. "Don' you never mention that man's name again roun' where I is at!"

He paused. Then: "C'mon out an' take a ride, Clarissy. I'll show you the swellest car a man ever got fo' the fines' li'l wife which is."

She made a game effort to rise, but the rack-ing pains which shot through every fiber of her body forced her down again.

"I—I reckons not now, 'Nopheles."

"You ain't much happy, hon. Is you so', countin' I got a secon'han' car."

Mention of automobiles made Clarissy ill. This seemed like a way out.

"Yeh—I reckon tha's it, 'Nopheles."

"Huh!" he retorted with some heat. "I reckon you don' know nothin' 'bout automobiles. This heah car is as good as new. They ain't a single thing wrong with it. That is, not hahdly nothin'—jest one li'l thing."

"One thing?" she queried languidly.

"Yeh; 'tain't nothin' impawtant. It's jes' that the accelerator is busted."

ALL'S SWELL THAT ENDS SWELL

THE sleep-laden eyes of Mr. Florian Slap-
pey opened reluctantly upon a flood of
midmorning sun which streamed in
through the uncurtained window and made ter-
ribly visible the worn spots of the rug which
partially covered the floor. Mr. Slap-
pey yawned, shook his head and sent forth inquiring
fingers to a chair which stood by the side of his
bed. They closed about a package of Turkish
cigarettes and a match. Mr. Slap-
pey lighted one of the cigarettes, inhaled luxuriously and
lay back upon his pillow.

But Florian was not happy—at any rate not
to the point of inconvenience. His worldly as-
sets consisted of the best wardrobe boasted by
any colored man in the city of Birmingham, an
overdue account for the room which he occupied,
nine dollars in cash and an insistent yearning
for the fleshpots.

Florian was up against a proposition. From
a nebulous background a form was emerging
and the form was labeled “Job.” Florian was
not personally opposed to work—provided it
was the other fellow who was working. As for

himself, he considered it beneath his dignity to labor at regular hours for someone else. Much of his social preëminence was due to the fact that he was looked upon as being a man of means, one to whom work might be a delight but certainly not a necessity. And Florian cared no more for his social prestige than a one-eyed man cares for his sole surviving optic.

The cigarette burned down to the chocolate fingers which clutched it and was flipped through the window. And then Florian sniffed. He sat up in bed and sniffed again. The odor was unmistakable—he had smelled similar smells before. He knew that it was bacon in the process of broiling. He had become poignantly aware of the fact that a rapidly depreciating cash balance had carried with it the necessity for gustatorial retrenchment. His meals of the past three days had been scanty and unnourishing. And now—he rose quickly and made a dive to swap his lavender pajamas for a union suit.

“You is in the house with fresh broilin’ bacon,” he soliloquized. “I think you both needs a intraduction to each other.”

He broke all records for quick dressing, despite the extra half minute which pride of place forced him to devote to the knot of his four-in-hand. Then he sauntered languidly down the steps of the rambling house and made

his way with well-simulated indifference toward the kitchen, the bacon and his landlady.

Mrs. Lorelie Shoots smiled in a most friendly manner. The picture presented by Florian as he lounged consciously in the doorway was one which demanded tribute. Into the breast of Mrs. Lorelie Shoots there came afresh a surge of pride in owning Mr. Slappey as one of her three roomers.

“Mawnin’, Mistuh Slappey.”

“Mawnin’, Missis Shoots. How you is makin’ it this fine day?”

“Tol’able, thank the Lawd! An’ you?”

“Oh, kind of! Where yo’ husban’ is at?”

“He’s done been down to the barber shop sence seven-thutty. He’s a workin’ man, Christopher is. It’s jes’ a shame that a man which is got his education an’ ’bility is got to be a barber.”

Florian nodded sympathetically.

“Times is boun’ to change, Missis Shoots. With all them swell pieces Christopher is writin’ for the papers they is boun’ to reckernize him as a great man some day soon. Yes’m, Missis Shoots, you sho’ was lucky when Christopher puck you out to get ma’ied to.”

“Wa’n’t I jes’?”

Florian glanced round.

“Semore Mashby is went out too, ain’t he?”

“He’s been gone sence seven o’clock. He’s the workines’ man. But he pays his room rent—in advance, which is mo’ than some of my roomers does.”

Florian affected not to notice the personal barb.

“Does you mean to infohm me,” he inquired with righteous indignation, “that Spokane G. Washington which has the room next to me, owes you fo’ his rent?”

“Yeh, I does. N’r neither that ain’t all. The man which has the room next to him owes me fo’ two months—twen’y dollars altogether.”

Florian smiled genially.

“The room nex’ to him? I ’clare to goodness, Missis Shoots, you is got the jokines’ way of reminding me that I owes you a triflin’ sum. It takes a ginuwine lady to be delicate like’n to that.”

She was pitifully insistent. It was plain that she did not wish to jangle Mr. Slappey’s high-strung nerves or offend his obvious gentility.

“You is gwine pay me real soon, ain’t you, Mistuh Slappey?”

He waved his hand airily.

“Co’s e I is. Ain’t I tol’ you that befo’?”

“You is been tellin’ me that fo’ two months. Co’s e you un’erstan’s, Mistuh Slappey, that I don’t noways question that you is got the

money, an' I is shuah that you ain't paid it on'y 'count of the fac' that you hates to bother with such small 'mounts, but my husban' is kinder worryin' me lately—Ise consid'able skeered he's gwine fin' out—"

"Fin' out which?"

She seated herself at the kitchen table and happened to intercept a longing glance which Florian cast upon the platter of broiled bacon and the pan of new white biscuits.

"He'p yo'se'f, Mistuh Slappey. I'll bet you ain't et no breakfas' ontill yet."

"No-o, I ain't hahdly b'lieve I has."

She rose and poured for him a cup of steaming coffee. Florian went at the meal delicately, with the air of a connoisseur.

"Hm! You is some swell cook, Missis Shoots. Now, reegahdin' yo' husban'?"

"It's thisaway," said Mrs. Shoots, immensely relieved at the prospect of unbosoming her troubles. "From the fust go-off when I wanted to rent this heah house on a yeah's least at thutty dollars a month Christopher was 'posed against it. He said we should keep the li'l house what we had on Avenue F ontill the future shaped itse'f mo' definite an' suttin."

"But I an' Christopher ain't be'n ma'ied fo' so long an' I soht of argied him out of hisse'f. I 'splained that I could git me th'ee roomers at

ten dollars a month each which would pay the rent an' we could save up the rent which we was payin' in the other house.

"Livin' in a house like'n to what this is, Mistuh Slappey, makes us as swell as any cullud folks in town, an' then I puck my boarders careful. Fust off I got Semore Mashby, which while mebbe he's a ol' skinflint is sho' nuff the riches' cullud man in Bummin'ham. Then I got you, which is the swellest young feller in the city."

"You sho' called 'em that time, Missis Shoots."

"An' then I got Mistuh Spokane G. Washin'ton, which I thought was a respectful an' sicksesful business man. An' so far fo' the two months I is been heah, Mistuh Slappey, you ain't paid me nothin' an' Mistuh Washin'ton is on'y paid fo' the fust month. Semore Mashby is the on'ies' man which has paid in full what he owes."

Florian leaned confidingly across the table and delivered himself of sage and sympathetic advice.

"Lis'en heah at what I is sayin', Missis Shoots. Don' you never let no money troubles git yo' goat. It don' take you nowhere."

"But," she wailed, "I is had to skimp on the housekeepin' to pay the rent an' I ain't even

been able to make a fust paymint on the set of mahogamy fu'niture I was plannin' to git fo' mine an' Christopher's room."

Florian tchk'd commiseratingly.

"Ain't that too bad? An' all because that wuthless Spokane Washin'ton is dead-beatin' you."

"N'r neither you ain't paid me nothin', Mistuh Slappey."

"Me? Don' you worry none 'bout me payin' you. You is as suttin to git my money real soon as you is that I is got it."

"An' I is fallin' behime ev'y minute, an' Christopher knows that you an' Mistuh Washin'ton ain't paid up, an' I ain't got my mahogamy bedroom set."

"You wants that set a heap, don' you?"

"You know I does."

"An' you an' Christopher is got a joint checkin' 'count down to the Fust National Bank, ain't you?"

"Yeh."

"An' if'n yo' boa'ders was payin' up regalar yo'd buy that set an' make yo' fust cash paymint on it, woul'n't you?"

"Yeh," she moaned, "an' the ve'y pretickeler set which I is done puck out is gwine be sol' ve'y soon an' promp'ly. An' if'n I was to buy it now Christopher would ast where the

money come from an' then he'd learn I had gone into debt some mo' an'—"

"Huh! Missis Shoots, he woul'n't learn nothin' of the kin' if'n you done it my way."

"Yo' way?"

"Uh-huh! You see, I is the bestes' man in this heah town fo' gittin' swell schemes, an' you is tore at my heartstrings with yo' story of how mebbe you is gwine lose the ve'y pertickeler mahogany set which you wants, so I sigges's that you draw the fust paymint outen the bank an' buy the set. Then when you gits it heah put it in my bedroom ontill I an' Spokane is paid up in full an' a few months in advance. Ontill that time yo' husban' c'n think that I is bought the furniture an' when ev'ything is straightened out he c'n learn that it is yourn. An' if'n things ain't go right I is willin' to 'sume full 'sponsibility fo' the paymints on same."

Lorelie was dazzled. There was no gainsaying the fact that Florian was a mighty persuasive talker, and Lorelie was weak in pride of house. She had set her heart on that particular set and was willing to mortgage her future to know that it was positively to be hers. She hesitated.

"I c'n git that soot fo' a hund'ed an' ten dollars—ten dollars down an' five dollars a week."

“An’ thutty dollars drawed outen the bank would make you all safe an’ you could buy the fu’niture an’ put it in my room an’ not tell Christopher anythin’ bouten it ontill all the deal was straightened out.”

“Mn!” Lorelie rose and prepared to wash dishes. Florian was right with her.

“Lemme he’p you, Missis Shoots.”

“You he’p me wash dishes?”

“Why suttinly,” he came back, seeing in the future many more succulent breakfasts to be paid for by this slight manual labor. “Washin’ dishes is the fondest thing I’m of.”

She gave in, thrilled with the glory of being assisted in post-culinary labors by this masculine social light.

“You is the democratickest feller, Mistuh Slaphey.”

He donned a gingham apron over his suit of checkered gray and pitched in with a will and an eye to future reward. And as he worked he talked—and Florian was considerable talker. Somewhere in the back part of his head there had been born the very germ of an idea which promised big things for Mr. Florian Slaphey, Esquire. It had come rather suddenly and he didn’t know just exactly what he intended doing, but Florian had too long lived by his wits to

fail in sowing seed for a crop which might be needed.

And so he extolled the glories which would come to Mr. and Mrs. Christopher P. S. Shoots by the possession of a seven-room house and a suite of mahogany furniture. He explained to her that the withdrawal of a small amount from the joint fund maintained at the bank by man and wife would merely be in the nature of a loan returnable in the immediate future when he—Florian Slappey—would pay the two months' rent already due and six months in advance, and that meanwhile the suspicions of Mr. Shoots would be lulled by the claim that the furniture belonged to Florian.

“An’ anyway,” reflected Mr. Slappey, “even if it don’ wuk out I ain’t riskin’ my money, an’ I is gwine sleep on ginuwine mahogany fo’ a month.”

If Mrs. Shoots had fancied that she entertained a passion for the furniture in question she learned now that her previous desire was as nothing to that which Florian Slappey deliberately implanted in her breast. And Florian being by nature a man who lightly assumed liabilities and sweated his way out of them was honestly unconscious of the fact that he was sowing seeds of discord in the heretofore happy Shoots household.

And Florian was still dilating upon the prestige inevitably attendant upon the ownership of ginuwine mahogamy furniture in conjunction with a seven-room house with the advantage, as Lorelie explained: "You is got yo' bath right heah. You don' have to bring it!" when Sis Callie Flukers appeared.

Sis Callie Flukers, dressed in the very ex-crescence of style, skinny beyond belief, occurred upon the back porch while Florian was wiping off the erstwhile container of the broiled bacon. She tapped lightly and slipped into the kitchen, narrow-set eyes darting suspiciously from Florian to Lorelie and then back again to Florian.

For a brief instant Florian's poise deserted him. He ripped off the domestic apron, flung it into a chair and started for the door. Sis Callie Flukers' nasal voice punctured the intense silence:

"Looks like I was int'ruptin' sumthin'."

"You ain't int'rupted nothin'," flashed Florian. "I is done finished."

"You ac's right at home," commented Sis Callie.

"Why not? I rooms heah."

"In the kitchen?"

"He—he on'y jes' been he'pin' me," commented Lorelie weakly.

“Tha’s it, Sis Callie—I on’y jes’ been he’pin’ her.”

“Fo’ a man which never hol’s no job you is got fon’ of wuk right suddint. We-e-ll, I ain’t blamin’ you so much. Lorelie is a pretty gal.”

“Sis Callie!”

“Don’ you min’ her, Missis Shoots,” interjected Florian hotly. “She don’ do nothin’ with her mouth on’y talk.”

And then Florian fled. He walked downtown at top speed and came to a halt at his favorite lounging place in front of the Champion Moving Picture Theater. He leaned against a telephone post, readjusted his necktie, took notice that his trousers were wrinkleless and idly surveyed the seethe of midday traffic.

“ ’Lo, Brother Slappey.”

Florian turned to face a tall emaciated negro who wore baggy clothes and a worried look. A smile of welcome decorated Florian’s face and his hand clasped that of the other man.

“Well, well! If’n ’tain’t Editor Vanguard Collins of *The Weekly Sponsor*! How you is, Editor Collins?”

“Tol’able fine, thank you, Brother Slappey,” rumbled the other. “How you is?”

“Prosp’rous. Ve’y prosp’rous.” It was not written in Florian’s book that others should know of temporary financial embarrassment.

“An’ how *The Sponsor* is gittin’ on, Editor Collins?”

Vanguard Collins appeared enthusiastic.

“Mos’ elegant. Entirely elegant, I might say, Brother Slappey.”

“Ain’t thinkin’ of sellin’, is you?” questioned Florian indifferently for want of something better to say. And because he was indifferent he didn’t notice the eyes of Vanguard Collins narrow to speculating slits.

“Why you asts that?”

Florian shrugged.

“Jes’ int’rusted—tha’s all.”

Editor Collins pressed the point.

“Int’rusted how?”

“Dunno,” laughed Florian. “Mebbe I is consid’rin’ goin’ into the newspaper game. It’s easy an’ they’s lots of money in it, ain’t they?”

“Yeh,” retorted Vanguard with a significant nuance, which was unnoticed by Florian. “You said it.”

“An’ I reckon yo’d be makin’ mo’ money than what you is if they wa’n’t no competition, woul’n’t you?”

Vanguard nodded his enormous head.

“Yassuh, you reemahked a wise reemahk that time, Brother Slappey. Co’s’e my paper is makin’ a heap of money, but I is let Brother Crispus Breech, which owns an’ edits *The*

Weekly Epoch, know that I stan's ready to pay him a thousan' dollars spot cash fo' his newspaper."

"On'y a thousan' dollars?" exclaimed Mr. Slappey. "That ain't sech a big price fo' a newspaper, is it?"

"We ain't got no mechanical 'quipment," explained the editor. "We runs our 'counts from month to month an' has the printin' done at a job plant."

"I see! I see!" said Florian vaguely. "An' you wants to buy out Editor Breech's paper fo' a thousan' dollars?"

"Uh-huh."

"Why won't he sell?"

"I an' him ain't ve'y good frien's, an' it makes him so' to know that my paper is makin' so much money it wan's to buy his'n out. His pride is ag'in sellin'. He's jes' on'y spitin' his nose to cut off his face."

"How come that?"

"'Cause his paper ain't wuth five hund'ed dollars."

"Then why," queried Florian craftily, "is you willin' to pay a thousan' fo' same?"

Editor Vanguard Collins snapped his fingers.

"A thousan' dollars is a mere baggytelle to me, Brother Slappey. An' it'd be wuth that in col' cash to have a clear fiel' an' no rival. I

is tellin' you, Brother Slappey, if'n you is thinkin' of enterin' into the newspaper business don' you go foolin' with Brother Breech. His paper ain't wuth nothin', or even less'n that."

"An' you is willin' to pay a thousan' dollars?"

"Cash money." He paused, and then: "Lemme heah from you an' give you a few advices when you gits to thinkin' serious bouten the newspaper business, will you, Brother Slappey? On'y jes' cause'n I an' you is feller members of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise."

"I is gwine do that ve'y same thing, Brother Collins. You is sho'ly stahted me thinkin'."

They parted. But the languid expression which had rested on the face of Florian Slappey had also departed. He was having another thought. And to a brain constantly alert for a method by which nothing could be made into something the possibilities developed by the casual dialogue with Editor Collins were limitless.

The thing was plain as two and two. Editor Breech's *Weekly Epoch* was in a bad way, but it was still strong enough to injure as a piece of business property the flourishing *Weekly Sponsor* as owned and edited by Vanguard Collins. Editor Breech would probably accept five hundred dollars from an outsider for his decrepit

journalistic venture, provided he was kept in ignorance of the fact that it was designed to become the property of his nearest and dearest enemy.

It was all good reasoning on Florian's part, considering that he was not a mind reader. Had he been able to see the workings of Editor Collins' mind he might not have thought as he did think or plan as he planned.

For contrary to his words Editor Vanguard Collins' *Weekly Sponsor* was in an exceeding bad way. Its bills were far overdue and its creditors insistent.

Vanguard, in common with about ninety-nine per cent of Darktown's population, was victim to the delusion that Florian Slappey was a man of exceeding affluence. Certainly he was a natural recruit to the Afro-American Fourth Estate. Vanguard had come to the belief that Florian was contemplating buying a newspaper and proceeded to press-agent *The Weekly Sponsor*. It never entered Vanguard's head that Florian was planning to sell him *The Weekly Epoch* for a thousand dollars. In fact it couldn't have entered his head that anybody was planning to sell him anything. He wasn't in the market for anything but his next meal.

And so Florian stumbled. He had taken Vanguard's hectically optimistic statements at par

and in his breast had been born the desire to purchase from Editor Breech *The Weekly Epoch* for five hundred dollars and then sell it to Editor Collins for a thousand—a clear profit of five hundred dollars without the risk of a penny.

Florian was faced, however, with the necessity for raising five hundred dollars with which to purchase *The Weekly Epoch*. The thing appeared impossible, but the impossible had in the past been child's play for Florian and he went cheerily about his task.

But he met with a cool reception. The money was to be had all right, but some collateral besides prestige was demanded—and Florian had none. He went to call upon Editor Crispus Breech.

Editor Breech was in a responsive mood. He admitted dolorously that the town jes' wa'n't big enough fo' two cullud papers liken to his an' Vanguard Collins' and that *The Weekly Epoch* had shot its bolt and found the door locked against itself. Therefore Editor Crispus was willing to accept five hundred dollars in payment for his property—lock, stock and barrel.

“Five hund'ed?”

“I said it, Mistuh Slappey.”

“What terms?”

“Cash.”

“How much down?”

“Five hund’ed dollars.”

“Not no less?”

“Nary nickel.”

There was no budging Crispus. That fiery little individual was grimly determined to go down fighting or pull out with five hundred good hard dollars to soothe his defeated feelings and set him up in another business; and at that his newspaper was a better value than the shattered tottering *Sponsor*. The two papers had played frenziedly at a gentle game of mutual throat-cutting for the past eight months. Result: Both were on the toboggan, each unaware of the other’s plight and each willing to concede victory if it could honorably be done or to pull out from under, provided someone could be found with little enough sense to hold the financial bag.

That afternoon Florian rode southward on the Highlands car, alighted at Fifteenth Avenue and walked to the crest of Milner Heights. Once there, he struck out into the woods, located a boulder and climbed upon it.

The panorama of Jones Valley was spread magnificently before him—the city with its ring of industrial fire, its tall chimneys spurting clouds of smoke and soot into the air, its beautiful residential section nestling along the

mountain at his feet safely away from the grime of the downtown section; its myriad suburbs—

Somewhere in that city was someone with five hundred dollars which was procurable—and by Florian. There was the Pool and Ginuwine lottery of course. But the drawings had been running against Florian of late and he had rather lost faith in his ability to pick winning combinations. Professional money lenders such as was Semore Mashby, who roomed with the Shoots—they were out of the question too. They demanded too much security.

But somewhere down there was his five hundred dollars. Some man or woman—

And suddenly Florian chuckled. He threw back his head and laughed aloud. The most obvious of all solutions had occurred to him last, perhaps because it was the most obvious. He slapped one well-manicured hand against a light-gray trousers leg.

“Lorelie Shoots,” he chuckled, “I an’ you is gwine split five hund’ed dollars’ profit.”

Lorelie Shoots it was—Lorelie, the pretty young wife of Mr. Christopher P. Shoots, who was known as a master hand at shaving a bearded face or massaging an unbearded one; whose timidity and lack of social ambition had forced his wife in beyond their depth in the matter of assuming a year’s lease on a seven-room

house and who was foolish enough to place all of his savings in the First National Bank subject to a joint account of himself and Mrs. Shoots.

It was decided. The die was cast. Lorelie Shoots was to furnish the necessary five hundred dollars. She didn't know it, but she was the chosen one. And Florian intended that there should be no getaway.

He worked carefully and single-mindedly. His performance of that morning was repeated the following morning and the next and the next. He reveled in her financial misery resulting from his own defection in the matter of lodgings bill and the ditto reluctance of Mr. Spokane G. Washington. He was insistent in declaring that there was only one way out for her—a quick outside investment with the family capital which was certain of adequate and prompt profit.

“But,” she wailed, “they ain't no such of a thing.”

“Yes they is.”

“Tell which?”

“I cain't tell you nothin' yet,” he said mysteriously. “But I is got ev'y cent of my available cash capital tied up in a quick an' suttin' propersition which is gwine net me between five hund'ed dollars' profit.”

“What I is got to do with that?”

"I dunno. You is been a mighty good frien' to me, Missis Shoots, in givin' me breakfases an' such, an' mebbe—"

"Oh, Mistuh Slappey, you don' mean you is gwine 'low me to put some money in' an' make some fo' my ownse'f?"

"Mebbe, Missis Shoots. Mebbe so I is. But I is gwine be sho' befo' I does—be sho' that you can lemme have the money one day an' I c'n give you it back 'long with the profits in a day or so later."

And beyond that he refused to speak. Lorelie was quite convinced—it had really been too easy.

It was all a question now of when he chose to borrow the five hundred. The world had taken on a bright and roseate appearance for Mr. Slappey. His heart jazzed within him.

But if in his intensive business absorption Florian had paid no heed to the personal element the same could not be said for Sis Callie Flukers, champion gossip of Darktown.

The scene in the Shoots kitchen on the event of her first memorable visit rankled in the inquiring mind of Sis Callie and she was quite determined to discover what was what and why. Thereupon she became an expert snooper and did most of her snooping round the Shoots homestead and those of the immediate neigh-

bors. What she discovered satisfied even her scandal-loving soul. She saw that Florian Slap-
pey, a roomer at the Shoots home, was eating
his breakfasts there daily; she saw a partner-
ship of matutinal domestic duties and inferred
many things which were as natural as they were
unjust. And finally she cornered Mr. Chris-
topher P. S. Shoots one evening as he was leav-
ing the barber shop where he labored daily and
told him the whole colorful story.

Christopher was impressed. He was natur-
ally of a jealous disposition and Florian Slap-
pey was one to bring a visit of the green-eyed
monster to any man with a pretty wife. He was
easy-going, polished, a sartorial epic—and he
did no work. But even while jealousy was boil-
ing within him Christopher was too just to go
off half-cocked.

“Is you positive shuah, Sis Callie?”

“Not no surer than what I am that t'-morry
is We'nesday.”

“But proof?”

“He ain't on'y rentin' a room from you, ain't
he?”

“Yeh.”

“Then how come her to give him his breakfas'
ev'y mawnin'? An' how come him to wash
dishes fo' her? B'lieve me, Mistuh Shoots,
when a man washes dishes fo' a ma'ied woman

they's sumthin' mo' to it than just lovin' the way the hot water feels. An' with Florian Slappey 'specially—it'll jes' plumb ruint the look of them sof' han's of his'n."

Christopher frowned sadly.

"An what else?"

"They talks t'gether all the time—mawnin's when you is away. An' what does a man an' woman usuamly talk about?"

"Don' ast me that, Sis Callie. I is a upright gen'leman."

"See?" she proclaimed triumphantly. "You hates even to think about it. Now you take a frien's advice, Brother Shoots, an' watch out yo' wife don' 'lope with Florian Slappey. Tha's all I is got to say."

It was aplenty and then some. Mr. Christopher P. S. Shoots meandered mournfully homeward with his heart pumping jealousy and his mind filled with dark and dire suspicion. It was not that Mr. Shoots believed his attractive young wife loved him less. It was that she must love Florian more. And while he didn't exactly blame her—knowing that he was no prize winner in a beauty show—he felt that it was a rather mean trick that Florian was attempting.

Seated on the veranda with his wife after a solemn evening meal, he broached the subject with extreme tact.

“Wha’s all this fumadiddles been gwine on betwix’ you an’ Flo’ian Slappey?”

“Tell which?” she queried, surprised.

“I is expostulated once a’ready,” he returned with great dignity. “You is been givin’ his breakfases an’ he is been he’pin’ you wash dishes.”

“They ain’t no harm in that, is they?”

“Not in that—no.”

“Then what you is astin’ ’bout?”

“ ’Bout what it means an’ whither it’s gittin’ you.”

“Don’ mean nothin’ an’ ain’t gittin’ me no whithers.”

“Then I advise as yo’ husban’—lawfully wedded an’ ma’ied with you—that you cease an’ tumminate this unseemin’ intimacy which has sprang up betwix’ you an’ Mistuh Slappey.”

She transfixed him with a belligerent glare.

“Does you mean to ’sinate, Mistuh Shoots—”

“I ain’t ’sinuatin’ nothin’. I says that enough is too much—an’ you is a’ready done enough.”

“Mistuh Slappey is a gen’leman.”

“So was Adam ontill he et the apple. I requests theyfo’ that you cease givin’ Mistuh Slappey breakfases.”

“You fo’gits that it loands tone to our house to have him stayin’ with us heah.”

“They is a limit to the price we c’n pay fo’ that tone,” he answered stiffly. “An’ besides, I ain’t so shuah—”

“An’ to prove it,” she flared, “he was tellin’ me on’y to-day that he was gwine buy a set of ginuwine mahogamy fu’niture fo’ his room, with a dressin’ table an’ ev’ything. If’n that ain’t swell, what is?”

There was patently no answer to such an argument, so Mr. Christopher P. S. Shoots rose and made a more or less graceful exit. Doubt still rankled in his breast, albeit it was not so insistent as it had been. Still there was danger.

And the following morning Florian struck. He explained to Lorelie that as a very special personal favor he was allowing her to invest five hundred dollars for three or four days and that in return therefor she was to receive a net profit of two hundred and fifty dollars, same being one half of the total profit certain to be made. The plan, especially as he presented it, was flawless. She was to go to the First National Bank and draw therefrom five hundred dollars, which she was to turn over to him. He then would buy *The Weekly Epoch* for that sum and sell it to Editor Vanguard Collins of *The*

Weekly Sponsor for one thousand dollars spot cash and split the profits.

She was enthusiastic but a trifle frightened.

“You—you is suah Editor Collins is gwine buy?”

“I is got his faithful promise. What mo’ c’n a man ask?”

Florian’s persistent press agency won an almost too easy victory. He accompanied her to the bank, where she withdrew five hundred dollars which she turned over to him.

“And now,” said he lightly, “now that you is sho’ to get this heah back again an’ two hund’ed an’ fifty mo’ in a couple of days, le’s us go down to the fu’niture sto’ an’ buy the mahogamy set of fu’niture.”

It was done, and out of the tiny surplus Lorelie had left from her housekeeping money she shelled out a ten-dollar advance payment and three weekly installments of five dollars each, making her safe from the collector for four weeks.

That afternoon the furniture was delivered. Also on that afternoon Editor Crispus Breech’s *Weekly Epoch* passed into the hands of one Florian Slappey for a cash consideration of five hundred dollars and under an agreement whereby Editor Breech was to continue on duty until such time as Florian succeeded in disposing of

it to a third person, as to the identity of whom Editor Breech was kept in ignorance.

With the title deed to *The Weekly Epoch* in his coat pocket Florian strode blithely to the offices of Editor Vanguard Collins. Editor Collins, explained a dusky typist, had gone for the day and was not scheduled to return until the morrow. Florian made an appointment for eleven in the morning and departed.

He did not see Lorelie until seven o'clock that night. She eyed him eagerly and he spoke sibilantly.

"Yo' husban' home?"

"No, not yit."

"Semo' Mashby?"

"He's in his room."

"An' Spokane Washin'ton?"

"He's home too. An' mo', he jes' paid me the ten dollars he owes me."

Florian grinned cheerfully.

"Tol' you things would break our way quick." He guided her to a little lounge which nestled in the shadows under the stairway. "Set you down heah. I wants to make talk with you."

She seated herself beside him while he reported satisfactory progress in their deal. And it was while they had their heads close together and their conspiring voices reduced to mere whispers that Christopher P. S. Shoots, hus-

band to Lorelie by marriage, oozed into the hallway and came upon them.

Christopher froze up.

"Ah!" he said icily. "I is caught you."

Florian rose. So did Lorelie. Innocent as the situation was, it was embarrassing.

"Caught which?"

"You an' my wife."

The conclusion struck Florian as sound and he nodded violent agreement.

"So you did—so you did."

"An'," questioned Mr. Shoots darkly, "what explanation is you got?"

"Yeh." Florian smiled foolishly. Then he turned to Lorelie. "What explanation we is got, huh?"

Lorelie shook her head.

"You is the snoopinest man, Christopher!"

"If'n a man cain't snoop roun' his own home, whose home can he snoop roun'?"

"You said it!" agreed Florian. "Whose home can he?"

Christopher turned away. His pride had been sadly injured.

"I says fo' the lastest time, Missis Shoots, that you an' Florian is got to quit them fuma-diddles! Tha's all!"

He retreated to the kitchen. Lorelie turned a troubled face to Florian.

"Mistuh Slappey," she pleaded, "you is got to do sumthin' quick bouten sellin' that newspaper an' returnin' back the money."

"Why so?"

"I is gittin' comprimised."

"Huh! You cain't git comprimised no comprimiser than what you is comprimised a'ready."

"Yes, I c'n," she wailed. "S'posin' Christopher should fin' out I drawed five hund'ed dollars of his money an' give it to you—what would he think then?"

"They is some men," returned Florian sagely, "which don' do nothin' but think things which they ain't got no right thinkin'. If'n yo' husban' is that soht of a man he deserves all the bad thoughts he c'n git."

And Christopher was gittin' them. He was gittin' them wholesale and he continued to git them even after he had dropped off into a nightmarish slumber that night. He was acutely conscious of the fact that somebody was doing him a plumb dirty trick, and he didn't like it. More, the thought of the free breakfasts which Florian was getting at his expense rather rankled. It seemed like piling a chocolate Pelion on an ebony Ossa. Whereupon Christopher P. S. Shoots schemed a scheme.

He was disarmingly bright and cheerful at

breakfast. He departed for the barber shop whistling gayly—and two hours later he returned. Florian, his immaculate serge suit camouflaged by an apron, was soapsudsing the dishwater for the bungalow-aproned Lorelie. Christopher paused in the doorway and flung a vicious ultimatum at the guilty couple.

“One mo’ time like’n to this,” he flared, “an’ you is gwine make me plumb mad!”

Then he turned and went back to his office. Florian doffed his apron and started for the door. He was worried and so was Lorelie.

“Where you is goin’, Mistuh Slappey?”

“Ise gwine down to sell that paper to Editor Collins an’ end all this foolishment,” he snapped. “I hates men which th’ows ’sinuations at me when I is tryin’ to make them some money.”

She stared at him as he went to the hall tree and snatched his floppy Panama hat. At the front door he turned.

“Missis Shoots,” he said, “you husban’ is shuah got a ’propriate middle name.”

“Wha’s that?”

“P. S.”

Florian made haste and speed to the office of Editor Vanguard Collins. He came to a sudden halt before the door, for backed up against it was a dray and into the dray was being piled

a mass of one-time office equipment. And while Florian gazed spellbound a sad and solemncholy Editor Vanguard Collins stumped heavily down the stairway and stood upon the sidewalk. His eyes brightened momentarily at sight of Florian.

“Mawnin’, Brother Slappey.”

“M-m-mawnin’, Editor Collins. Wh-wh-what you is doin’?”

“Don’ matter what I is doin’. I asts you now fo’ a quick answer. Does you want to buy *The Sponsor* fo’ two hund’ed an’ fifty dollars cash?”

Florian staggered. Something was radically wrong and Florian had more than a suspicion that he was the wrongee. “I—I thought you was wantin’ to buy *The Weekly Epoch* fo’ a thousand dollars,” he gasped.

Vanguard laughed with harsh pessimism.

“If I ever seen a thousan’ dollars all to wunst, Brother Slappey, I’d drop dead.”

“But—but you said—”

“I thought you was plannin’ to buy *The Sponsor* an’ I was showin’ you what a good thing it was.”

“Y-you thought I was gwine buy yo’ paper offen you?”

“Now you is tootin’.”

“Gosh, gol’ fish! I is stang sho’ nuff!”

“You is which?”

“I’ll sell you *The Weekly Epoch* fo’ five hundred dollars cash!”

Editor Collins stared at Florian for a few moments, then he threw back his head and laughed raucously.

“My Gawd,” he roared, “does you mean that you went an’ bought that imytation newspaper to sell to me fo’ a thousan’ dollars?”

“Y-y-yeh.”

Vanguard’s hand clapped on Florian’s shoulder.

“They’s one good thing bouten it, Brother Slaphey. You think you is in hard luck a’ready. Well, what you is now ain’t nothin’ to what you is gwine be if’n you owns *The Weekly Epoch*. It’s wuss’n a death sentence.”

It was a sad and shaken Florian who turned lethargic steps from the home of the now silent *Sponsor*. He was now seized and possessed of a property which impressed him as a strong liability. More, he had enlisted the financial aid of a lady friend who happened to be married to another man, and he dreaded that gentleman’s ire when he discovered that his bank account had been heavily tapped under circumstances which placed Florian in no very favorable light.

“Always,” muttered Florian to himself, “when I thinks I is in bad I fin’s out afterwards

that the way I was ain't nothin' to the way I gits."

He rambled homeward, his feet leaden and his mind cowardly. Even the thought of the mahogany bedroom suite, which now decorated his room, lent no ray of happiness. The world was a dark and gloomy place and Florian the darkest and gloomiest inhabitant thereof.

He broke the news gently.

"Missis Shoots," he proclaimed, "I an' you is done played hell!"

For a minute she stared at his lugubrious countenance and she sensed catastrophe. All the insouciance had departed. It was a new Florian Slappey who stood before her—a man crushed and defeated.

"Tell which?" she gasped.

"*The Sponsor* ain't an' we is."

"Is what?"

"In bad. Vanguard Collins was lyin' to me when he said he'd pay a thousan' dollars for *The Epoch*, countin' he thought I was wantin' to buy me a newspaper fo' my ownse'f an' he wanted to sell me his'n."

"An' he ain't gwine buy ourn offen us?"

"He ain't gwine buy nothin' from nobody. He's flat busted an' gone out of business."

"O-o-oh!" In a second Mrs. Lorelie Shoots' cosmic scheme had gone flooie. She whirled on

Florian: "You—you—you"— she struggled, seeking for a fitting expletive—"you—you—buzzard!"

She turned and flew upstairs. Florian listened mournfully to her footsteps in the room overhead. And finally she came down again, hatted for the street.

"Where you is gwine, Missis Shoots?" he inquired meekly.

"Ise gwine seek the adwices of a feller which is got real brains."

"Name' which?"

"Lawyer Evans Chew!"

Florian watched her as she descended the porch steps to the gate and then flung angrily up the street. The idea of bringing a lawyer into the mess was not at all consoling—and Lawyer Chew, of all attorneys. Florian Slappey looked upon him as omniscient.

It was patently Florian's cue to do something definitely and promptly. But what? What was there to do? What could—there was but one possible course and that was to unload on some unwary person with journalistic ambitions. The trouble lay in finding such a one who possessed—along with the literary afflatus—sufficient cash to swing the deal.

Nor was Florian overly anxious to hold the spotlight in this particular deal for one second

longer than was absolutely necessary. If only he could find a middleman with influence, business acumen, wide acquaintance!

Something bumped into Florian, disturbing the smoothness of his red and white striped silk shirt. He whirled and stared into the eyes of Semore Mashby, fellow roomer. Semore was nothing in particular to stare at. He had drawn from the dispenser of human dimensions more height than was his due and less girth. He was lantern-jawed and pop-eyed and his too-shiny clothes and sadly patched shirt and hose belied the fact that he was by all odds the wealthiest negro in Birmingham.

By profession Semore Mashby was a loan shark. He dubbed himself broker and he handled anything from a secondhand wedding dress to a financing proposition. He drove bargains which were hard—for the other fellow—and was hated accordingly by his dusky brethren, who nevertheless turned to him in their hours of direst need when every pawnable article was already at work as security for funds borrowed. There was nothing upon which Semore would not lend something—from a job to a baby.

And Florian gazed upon the unhandsome shape of Semore Mashby and knew that Semore was his man. Whereupon he collared that gen-

tleman, shoved him into his room, jammed a good cigar between his teeth and fired a disconcerting question:

“Brother Mashby, how’d you like to make some money easy?”

Semore gulped and blinked.

“How’d you like to make some money easy?”

“They ain’t no such of a thing,” came the guttural response.

“Yes they is.”

“How much I is got to put up?”

“Nothin’.”

“Not a dollar?”

“No, n’r neither even two bits.”

Semore leaned forward. Florian had begun to talk in Semore’s very best language.

“‘Splain yo’s’e’f, Brother Slappey. You talks like a man of sense.”

Florian explained—explained that he had purchased the *Epoch* from Editor Crispus Breech for five hundred dollars and that he was anxious to get out from under promptly; and as he talked a new idea came to him.

He argued with Semore that now Vanguard Collins had suspended the publication of *The Sponsor*, deadliest and onliest rival to *The Weekly Epoch*, there was no reason why *The Epoch* should be other than a sound business

venture. And what Florian wanted Semore to do was to sell his paper for him.

"What I git out of it?" queried Semore cannily.

"You gits this, Brother Mashby: Fo' ev'y dollar you gits over five hund'ed dollars I divides with you equal an' fifty-fifty."

"Not on the fust five hund'ed?"

"Nossuh! I done shelt out good ha'd cash fo' that. I is willin' to sell fo' five hund'ed an' as my agent I 'powers you to do same. But you don' git nothin' on it. But if'n you sells fo' a thousand dollars you gits two hund'ed an' fifty an' don' risk a penny. It's jes' like a lawyer's extinction fee. Is you with me?"

Semore sparred for time. "I ain't hahdly know."

"Is you is or is you ain't?"

"Hm!" Semore eyed his companion. It was patent that Florian was not in a dickering mood.

"I is!"

"Good!"

"You ac's like I had took a load offen yo' mind."

"Yeh, an' I wants you to ac' like you is took a newspaper offen my han's—at a profit."

Meanwhile in the spacious private sanctum of Lawyer Evans Chew a semihysterical woman, Lorelie Shoots by name, was pouring forth her woes in adjectival monologue. Through it all

Lawyer Chew sat imperturbably blinking at her from behind enormous tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles. And finally the whole story came to an end—a sobby and tearful end.

“An’ what I wants back,” wailed Mrs. Shoots, “is me’n my husban’s five hund’ed dollars.”

Chew cogitated. He was the champion cogitator of the world.

“A-hem! Florian Slappey is got it from offen you?”

“He is, an’ I is done bought the ginuwine mahogamy fu’niture, which I cain’t pay fo’, an’ a’ready my husban’ is so’ at me an’ ain’t spoke a word at me sence the las’ time an’—I wants my five hund’ed dollars back.”

Chew tapped on the table with a silver pencil.

“Yo’ five hund’ed dollars which you give Florian—”

“I never give him nothin’. He induced me out of it.”

“Jes’ the same, the fac’s of the case as presinted to a jury—”

“But I don’ want no jury. I want my five hund—”

“Jes’ a minute, Missis Shooks. You derails my train of thought. What I was reemahkin’ was that if the fac’s of the case was presinted to a jury, which they won’t be, ’countin’ the best

traditions of the bench an' bar is against litigation when they is any way of gittin' a fee fo' a settlin'ment, which is easier than a trial an' which I favors most hearty—if'n they was to heah the fac's they ain't hahdly a doubt they would decide unanimous that you is overstepped the boun's of discretion an' that you knowingly an' with aforethought give him this heah money of yo' own free will an' accord, thereby establishin' a statute quo ante which would hol' an' maintain that he done right, an'—"

Mrs. Lorelie Shoots gasped and sank for the third time in the sea of words. She extended a helpless pleading hand.

"Jes' a minute, Lawyer Chew. I ain't hahdly gotten mo' than nothin' of what you done said."

"Summed up brief an' pointed," went on the attorney and counselor placidly, "Florian ain't done nothin' you c'n sue him for n'r yet put him in jail."

"But what is I to do? What c'n I do? With my husban' a'ready not speakin' to me on account he is jealous there is sumthin' betwix me an' Florian—which same they ain't an' never will be—an' me havin' took five hund'ed dollars—"

"You is a'ready done the right thing, Missis Shoots."

"Which?"

“You is consulted the best cullud lawyer in this heah noble an’ sov’eign state.”

“Then you think you c’n git my five hund’ed back? Does you think that?”

“I ain’t said I can.”

“N’r neither you ain’t said you cain’t.”

“Missis Shoots, I ain’t never gwine say that. They ain’t no sech of a word as ‘cain’t’ in my lexicography.”

“But if’n you promises, Lawyer Chew—”

“I is on’y gwine promise that I will take the case in question an’ now befo’ me under grave an’ d’lib’rate advisement an’ ’praise you of my c’nclusions in jue co’sse. My advice at this moment is to sit stiddy in the boat an’ talk not to no one whichsoever—least of all yo’ husban’—an’ my fee is twen’y-five dollars.”

Lorelie left the Penny Prudential Bank Building, which housed the legal activities of Lawyer Evans Chew, with a feeling of safety in her heart. She didn’t know just what Lawyer Chew would do, but in common with her cullud brethren and sistern she had implicit faith in his power to make order where chaos existed. And she was determined that she would heed both of his advices. She would sit steady in the boat and she would not tell—no, not even mention one single, solitary, teeny word to her husband.

And in the meantime Semore Mashby had re-

tired to the privacy of his room in the Shoots manse to reflect upon the task he had undertaken for Florian Slappey. That Florian's name was to be kept out of the transaction he fully understood. More, he understood exactly that unless he could sell the newspaper for more than five hundred dollars he was to receive no fee. Therefore it devolved upon him to get more than the five hundred—a great deal more.

He checked over on the fingers of both hands the names of acquaintances who were possessed of five hundred or more dollars in cash: Simeon Broughton, Boston Marble, Dr. Vivian Simmons, Rev'end Plato Tubb, Professor Alec Champagne, Truman Chinnors, Bud Peagler, Rev'end Wesley Luther Thigpen, Acey Upshaw, Dr. Brutus Herring, Cleophus White, Keefe Gaines, Hammond Bias, Christopher P. S. Shoots—

Semore Mashby ceased to think. A chuckle agitated his cheeks. Christopher Shoots of course. Who else?

By profession Christopher was a barber, but he was temperamentally ag'in his profession. For many long and bitter years he had aspired to literary fame and his vitriolic pieces in the paper dealing with every imaginable topic from a defaulting lodge treasurer to international politics—the whole array garnished with mal-

apropian tongue-twisters—had become famous locally.

Christopher had money—witness his year's lease on this big seven-room house, his recent purchase of a one-quarter interest in the handsome shop where he displayed daily his tonsorial skill, the hornless phonograph in the parlor and the enormous record collection consisting of seventeen discs.

Semore cornered Christopher that night and into the ears of the barber with journalistic aspirations he dripped honeyed words having to do with literary attainment. Now that *The Sponsor* was defunct, argued Semore, there was nothing on earth which could prevent *The Weekly Epoch* from returning something in the neighborhood of a thousand per cent on the investment. It was in the field alone and competitorless, a law unto itself, a Koh-i-noor among newspapers of its class.

“But if’n it’s all what you say it is,” queried Christopher wisely, “whaffo’ does the owner wish to sell?”

Semore hesitated, but only for a second.

“It’s thisaway,” he explained glibly: “He’s done decided to leave the city.”

“Leave?”

“Uh-huh! He’s gwine Nawth fo’ his health.”

“How much he wants fo’ it?”

“Fifteen hund’ed dollars.”

Christopher shook his head positively.

“I woul’n’t pay no fifteen hund’ed dollars if’n you was to offer me ev’y newspaper in N’Yawk.”

Semore lowered his voice confidentially.

“Fifteen hund’ed dollars is what he wants, Brother Shoots, but I is tellin’ you that they is a heap of things which us folks wants which we don’ git. Fifteen hund’ed dollars fo’ *The Weekly Epoch* is one of ’em, though I is tellin’ you as a sincere frien’ that it is wuth two thousan’ easy. What I is sayin’ is that I b’lieve I c’n git it fo’ you fo’ a thousan’ dollars.”

“One thousan’?”

“Cash.”

“Hm! All what is to it—circulation an’ goodwill an’ ev’ythin’?”

“Even the two typewriters.”

Christopher hesitated. A thousand dollars was a good deal of money, but the potentialities were limitless.

“Is you willin’ I should cumsider it over a while?”

“We-ell, if’n you must. C’n you give me a positive shuah answer by t’-morry mawnin’?”

“Yeh, by t’-morry mawnin’.”

“Because the reason bein’ this as follows:

You is got to tell me definite an' positive so's I c'n go to the owner, which wants fifteen hund'ed dollars, an' say: 'Heah, ol' man, I c'n git you a thousan' dollars cash to-day befo' night.' An' I think that'll make him sell."

"I'll let you know in the mawnin'," repeated Christopher, and retired to his room.

It was a mournful night for Mr. and Mrs. Shoots. The specter of Florian Slappey and broiled bacon sealed the lips of Mr. Shoots and he was fairly racked with desire to discuss with her the move he was contemplating. She on her part longed to confide in her husband the story of her raid on their joint bank account and dared not while his anger was still a-seethe within him. And so they lay beside each other through all the night, awake for the greater part, worrying over thoughts which were almost identical in nature.

When they rose and dressed the following morning no word had been spoken between them, no armistice declared. Lorelie was still terrified, Mr. Shoots determined.

Semore cornered him in the hallway as he finished his breakfast.

"Is you decided?"

"I is."

"Is you gwine buy *The Weekly Epoch*?"

"Yes, fo' one thousan' dollars."

“An’ if’n I c’n swing the deal you is willin’ to pay cash money to-day?”

“You said it.”

“Well take my advice an’ go to the Fust National an’ withdraw the thousan’ dollars out. Cause’n I is shuah I c’n ’range the matter.”

Christopher made his way to the barber shop. Semore returned to his room and sank once more into a slough of thought. He regarded *The Weekly Epoch* as sold to the barber with whom he lived. The very thought of the ambitious Christopher had been inspirational. He would sell for one thousand dollars, pocket two hundred and fifty and turn the other two hundred and fifty profit over to Florian Slappey.

He was well pleased with the idea of his own profit, but somehow he didn’t like the idea of the two hundred and fifty which was to become Florian’s by dint of his master ability as a newspaper sales agent. Florian was willing to take five hundred dollars. Semore fancied he would be thoroughly satisfied with it in cash and that immediately. Therefore—

Florian was roused from a deep and dreamless sleep by the entrance of Semore Mashby. That tattered individual seated himself in the one chair which the room boasted, rested an arm on the ginuwine mahogany dressing table and surveyed the pink-pajama-clad young man who

lay luxuriously between the sheets of the new four-poster bed.

"I is come to tell you, Brother Slappey, that they ain't nothin' doin'."

"Nothin' doin' which?"

"Folks don' seem to want to buy no newspapers. I reckon I an' you had better call our deal off."

Florian sat up suddenly, thoroughly alarmed.

"Call off you sellin' *The Weekly Epoch* fo' me?"

"Tha's it. You wants action too quick."

"'Tain't a case of want—it's a case of got to git. That paper is got to be sol' right now."

"Cain't be done. On'y one way, that is—"

"One way?"

"Yeh. 'Countin' I is a warm an' firm personal frien' of your'n I might be willin' to gamble on the thing by payin' you five hund'ed dollars cash money right now an' takin' *The Weekly Epoch*. Then if'n I sells it fo' mo' than that in the future I is to keep all the profits, 'countin' I is takin' a big chance fo' the pu'pose of he'pin' you out."

Florian reflected hastily. There was much sound logic in Semore's argument and it was worth at least five hundred dollars' consideration. And just at that particular moment five hundred dollars cash looked as large to

Florian as five millions. He extended his hand.

“Gimme the five hund’ed.”

Semore bent his head to conceal any facial evidence of the surge of exaltation within him. He extracted a check book from an inner pocket of the frayed coat and wrote busily with an indelible pencil. Finally he handed the check and a crude receipt over to Florian. Mr. Slaphey regarded the check reverently, signed the receipt and extended his hand.

“Done with you, Brother Mashby.”

“You is reemahked sumthin’, Brother Slaphey. *The Weekly Epoch* is mine now—all mine?”

“All yourn—thank the Lawd!”

Semore descended the front steps and started blithely down the street in search of Christopher P. S. Shoots, proprietor-to-be of *The Weekly Epoch*, sole surviving colored weekly newspaper. His heart caroled within his skinny breast and his wallet gaped with almost human expectancy of the five-hundred-dollar profit which was soon to swell it.

Semore found the barber shop, but he didn’t locate Mr. Shoots. Mr. Shoots had gone out for a couple of hours and no one in the shop could inform Mr. Mashby of his whereabouts. As a matter of fact Mr. Shoots had gone to the First

National Bank. He carried with him his savings-account book, never noticing that his cash balance was nine hundred dollars, where it should have been fourteen hundred. He wrote a check for a thousand, shoved it across the counter casually and—

“You have only nine hundred in the bank, Shoots.”

“Huh?” And then Christopher smiled tolerantly. “You is read the figgers wrong, white folks. They is fo’teen hund’ed there.”

The teller shook his head.

“No, there was until the other day when your wife withdrew five hundred dollars.”

A trip hammer seemed to descend from the ceiling and smite Christopher P. S. Shoots a mighty smite. Forgotten was *The Weekly Epoch*, forgotten the purpose of his visit, forgotten everything save the perfidy of his wife, to whom he had intrusted a joint savings account.

“S-s-s-s-says which?” he stammered.

“Why, yes,” explained the little bank clerk. “Your wife drew out five hundred dollars just the other day.”

The cream-colored walls of the big bank whirled before Christopher’s eyes. He grabbed for his bank book and stared dazedly upon the written proof.

“Sh-sh-she was alone?”

The bank man frowned.

“No.”

“They—they di’n’t happen to be a sporty li’l light-tan uppity cullud man with her, did they?”

“Ye-e-es, I believe there was.”

“Oh, my gosh!”

Christopher slapped the bank book in his pocket, clapped one hand to his head, darted across the bank and out through the revolving doors onto Twentieth Street. By some miracle he avoided a sudden demise beneath the wheels of a traffic-law-busting jitney as he crossed the busy thoroughfare and started at top speed down Second Avenue. He traveled in high with the accelerator depressed to the limit, shot across Nineteenth, rounded the post-office corner at an angle and catapulted into the elevator of the Penny Prudential Bank Building.

Lawyer Evans Chew was just leaving his office as Christopher arrived. Chew gave ground in the collision. Ten minutes later he had pieced together the hypothetical story which Christopher sobbed at him.

“An’ if’n they ever was sech a case as what I is done tol’ you, Lawyer Chew, what ought should a husban’ do bouten it?”

Chew concealed the grin of elation which was

struggling for expression on his lips. Christopher's story was so patently real and not hypothetical that Chew would have spotted it anyway. But when in addition to the Shoots' hysteria, which gave truth to hypotheses, Lawyer Chew had already heard from the lips of Mrs. Shoots the other end of the five-hundred-dollar story he knew that things were coming his way and coming in great luscious gobs.

Therefore he extended a gently consoling hand.

"You is talkin' bouten a frien' of yourn, Brother Shoots?"

"Uh-huh. The ve'y mos' pretickeler frien' which I is got."

"An' you wishes my advices fo' a twenty-five-dollar fee?"

"I does."

Lawyer Chew extended an insinuating palm and into it dropped two ten-dollar bills and a single five.

"An' now," gasped Christopher, "what is you gwine do?"

"I inten's takin' the case under advisement."

"Under advisement? Under advisement? With my—er—a—my frien's wife mebbe playin' fumadiddles with his five hund'ed dollars? What soht of law business you calls that?"

"Fu'thermo'," continued Lawyer Chew con-

fidently, "I advises that fo' a day or two you sits stiddy in the boat an' don' 'tempt to rock same. An' least of all, I advises that yo' frien' don' make no hints to his wife that he has 'scovered that anythin' is wrong."

"My gosh! Lawyer Chew, you mus' think my frien' is a regalar simp."

"I does," retorted Chew.

From the office of Lawyer Evans Chew, the triumphant, went Christopher P. S. Shoots, the depressed. And he went straight to the office of *The Weekly Epoch*, where he found Editor Crispus Breech, the fat fiery little ex-owner of the paper, who was still at work until the new management assumed possession.

"Editor Breech," sizzled Christopher, "I comes heah to ast you a plain, simple, hones' question: Does you still own *The Weekly Epoch*?"

"Nossuh, I doesn't."

"Who you sol' it to?"

"Florian Slappey," came the prompt answer.

The effect of that gentleman's name upon Mr. Christopher P. S. Shoots was little short of startling. His eyes popped open, his jaw dropped, his figure seemed to sag at the middle. And suddenly he whirled and fled down the narrow flight of steps leading to Fourth Avenue.

Two and two and two were put together to make six hundred million for Christopher—Florian's intimacy with Lorelie, the fact that Lorelie had been accompanied by Florian while drawing out five hundred dollars of his good hard-earned money, Semore's statement that the owner of *The Weekly Epoch* was willing to sell at a sacrifice because he was leaving the city.

It was plain as the hook on a parrot's nose. Florian Slappey and Mrs. Lorelie Shoots were about to elope. More, he was not only financing the deal with five hundred dollars of his savings but Florian was unloading a newspaper on him for a thousand dollars! The thing was preposterous, unthinkable, outrageous! Christopher was seeing pink and swearing blue. He burst into Lawyer Chew's office like a young tornado and imperiously ordered the stenographer out. Lawyer Chew rose.

"You must clam yo'se'f, Mistuh Shoots—you suttinly must."

"Clam myse'f? Me? My Gawd, Lawyer Chew, you don' know what has happen' to make me unclam!"

"'Tain't nothin' so bad it cain't be wusser, Mistuh Shoots."

"Huh! Is you ever hearn of anythin' worse than yo' wife elopin' with another feller and you payin' fo' the trip?"

Lawyer Chew speculated for a minute.

“Well,” he said at length, “mebbe so you is got a li'l cause to be hurt.”

But as Christopher went into the details of the affair as he had learned them light again came to Lawyer Chew and he delivered himself unctuously of his opinion:

“I is done gave you the bestes' advice possible a'ready, Mistuh Shoots, same bein' that you reemains stiddy in the boat an' don' rock same, also that you don' cas' no unjus' s'picious on yo' wife, which I am shuah is as pure as lard.”

“But, Lawyer Chew—”

“I is a man of judicial discernment, Mistuh Shoots, an' I sees that in my han's such a difficulty as the one you is in ain't on'y chil's play to straighten out. So I advises you to say nothin' of yo' s'picious to yo' wife n'r neither mos' of all yo' wife's gen'leman frien'—an' trus' in me an' the Lawd.”

Christopher eventually departed from the sanctum, chastened in spirit and gripped by an optimism which he could not understand. It was not plain to him what Chew had done or could do to alleviate the misery of an eloping wife and a ditto five hundred dollars. He was particularly bitter about the five hundred dollars. It was in the nature of insult added to in-

jury. Besides it was playing havoc with his golden opportunity to elevate himself from barberism to journalism.

Lawyer Chew was chuckling as he again summoned his stenographer and picked up the dictation of a verbose legal document where it had been dropped at the moment of Christopher's unceremonious entrance. Things were coming Chewward in one grand and glorious heap. He was very much at peace with himself and with the world—Evans Chew, the domestic mediator, attorney *par excellence*.

There came a knock at the outer door. The dusky stenographer answered and returned with a puzzled expression on her face.

"It's Missis Lorelie Shoots, Lawyer Chew, an' she is smilin'."

She was smiling broadly as she entered the office and was left alone with her legal adviser, for as a matter of fact all that was worrying Lorelie at that moment was the domestic discord. Terror had departed with the speed of a Liberty motor that is willing to mote. She opened her purse, extracted a crisp new five-dollar bill and planked it down before Lawyer Chew.

"Tha's on 'count of my fee to you of twen'y-five dollars," she announced.

"A-a-ah! Sumthin' has happened?"

“Yeh. I is got back my five hund’ed dollars!”

“Where from?”

“Florian Slaphey.”

“Where did he git five hund’ed dollars at?”

“He sol’ *The Weekly Epoch* fo’ that sum an’
’mount.”

“So-o-o! Who to?”

“Semore Mashby.”

Chew’s feet landed flatly on the floor. He was all attention.

“Semore Mashby?”

Lorelie laughed.

“Yeh! He done tol’ me how he put one over on Semore. Y’see he’d done made Semore his agent to sell *The Epoch* an’ they was to split fifty-fifty all they got fo’ it over five hund’ed dollars. Semore foun’ out he coul’n’t sell it right off, so he boughten it fo’ five hund’ed an’ thinks he is gwine make a regalar profit on the deal fo’ hisse’f.”

“Hm! They ain’t no reason why he shoul’n’t, Missis Shoots. With *The Sponsor* ceased an’ sispended publication, *The Weekly Epoch* ought to make money.”

“Semore Mashby should worry bouten that. Me, I is got back my five hund’ed dollars an’ the rest of my troubles don’ look like nothin’, or even less’n that.”

“An’,” persisted Lawyer Chew, “when

Semore bought the paper offen Florian he di'n't say nothin' 'ceptin' that he coul'n't sell it an' di'n't know when he could?"

"Tha's it."

"An' what you is done with the five hund'ed dollars Florian gave you back?"

She smiled.

"I is interred it in the Fust National Bank from where it come out of."

"I see!"

"An' now I ain't skeered of my husban' ever findin' out it has been gone."

"No, sholy not you ain't skeered of that," answered the lawyer as he envisioned Christopher's attitude of a few moments since. "They ain't nary single chance of him findin' out."

But scarcely had Lorelie left the office when Chew telephoned the barber shop where Christopher worked and summoned that gentleman to an audience.

"I is got some good news fo' you," was all he said.

It was enough and then some. Christopher negotiated the two and a half blocks in a few seconds less than nothing. Once in the office he stood panting.

"You is got some good news fo' me?"

"I is."

"My wife—

“This is mo’ importanter than yo’ wife. I is tellin’ you that yo’ five hund’ed dollars is back in the bank from where it was took.”

“No!”

“Yeh. Ev’y nickel of it.”

“How you know it?”

“Nemmin’ how I know it. Us lawyers is got a habit of knowin’ things which ordinary folks don’ know an’ woul’n’t on’erstan’ if’n they did. Also I knows that you is gwine buy *The Weekly Epoch* offen Semore Mashby. Is you or ain’t you?”

“I—I—was. Does you think it’s a good proposition?”

“Mos’ excellint. Entirely fine. With *The Sponsor* out of the way, they ain’t no reason why *The Weekly Epoch* shoul’n’t make a lot of money on’ impaht to its editor an’ owner a social an’ cimmunity prestige an’ eklat unobtainable by other means. Now as yo’ ’torney I asks you how much was you gwine pay fo’ it?”

“One thousan’ dollars cash. The owner said he woul’n’t sell fo’ less’n fifteen hund’ed dollars. It’s Florian Slappey, drat his hide!”

“An’ Semore said that him bein’ sech a good frien’ of yourn he could wuk the deal fo’ a thousan’ even?”

“You sho’ does know a heap of things, Lawyer Chew.”

"Oh, I reckon I is a pretty knowin' man. Fac' it, gittin' to know things is jes' about the ve'y bestes' thing what I does. Now what I is askin' you is this: Is you willin' to make two hund'ed an' fifty dollars?"

"Make it how?"

"Is you willin' to buy that paper fo' seven hund'ed an' fifty stid of one thousan' dollars?"

"You is talkin' foolishment, Lawyer Chew. Co'se Ise willin', 'ceptin' on'y I kinder hates to pay fo' my wife's honeymoon with Florian."

Chew waved an airy hand.

"This heah is business, Mistuh Shoots. You c'n worry bouten yo' wife later. That's my advice."

Christopher expressed his willingness to save two hundred and fifty dollars on the deal for *The Weekly Epoch*, and promised faithfully that he would leave all negotiations in the hands of Lawyer Evans Chew. At the attorney's request he left the Penny Prudential Bank Building in search of Semore Mashby, more than a little dazed at the amazing trend of recent events in his hitherto placid single-track existence.

"Gittin' to be an editor," he soliloquized, "sho' is pretty hellish."

Within twenty minutes he was again in Lawyer Chew's office with a muchly puzzled Semore Mashby in tow. At first Semore had opposed

the idea of going to Lawyer Chew's office. In the first place there was no love lost between the men, and in the second place Semore held Chew's abilities in great respect. So it was that he entered Chew's office knowing that he was going to emerge with some loss of contentment.

He was not prepared for the excessive affability with which Chew greeted him, nor was Chew's offer of seven hundred and fifty dollars cash for *The Weekly Epoch* a shock. He had anticipated something worse than that. Of course he argued for a thousand and offered to split the difference, but Chew was adamant. Christopher P. S. Shoots sat limply in the corner, trying vainly to follow the wordy battle, and finally gave it up in disgust and turned his thoughts to other matters.

In the end Semore Mashby gave in just as Lawyer Chew had known from the first that he must do. And then and there the contract was drawn transferring title in *The Weekly Epoch* from Semore Mashby to Christopher P. S. Shoots. Semore read the document carefully. He paused part way down page two.

"This heah says, Lawyer Chew, that I owes you ten dollars fo' drawin' the contrac'."

"You is a good reader, Mistuh Mashby."

"You is representin' Mistuh Shoots—not me."

"I is representin' both in this legal labor,

Mistuh Mashby. Mistuh Shoots is payin' me a fee of twen'y-five dollars an' you c'n either pay me ten dollars fo' drawin' the contrac', or the whole deal is heahby declared off an' tumminated. Which does you choose?"

Semore chose to pay the ten. But a little farther down he again raised questioning brows.

"You says in heah that the consid'ration is one thousan' dollars."

"I does. One thousan' dollars."

"But he ain't on'y payin' me sevum hund'ed an' fifty dollars."

"Cirrec' the fust time. I is writin' that thousan' dollars c'nsid'ration in to pretec' my client case'n he ever wants to sell it or put a mortgage on it or sumthin'. In that case then an' in such event he c'n prove that he paid a thousan' dollars for the newspaper."

"But he di'n't."

"Ain't nobody gwine know that, Mistuh Mashby. Co'se if'n you ain't willin' to let the thousan' dollars stand as 'tis, why, we c'n call the deal off."

Semore Mashby signed the conveyance, paid his ten dollars to Lawyer Chew and departed the office feeling a mingled sense of elation and depression. He was two hundred and forty dollars to the good, but more than a trifle apprehensive. Lawyer Chew had been too sure of his

ground. Semore felt that there was something in the wind and that he had not heard the last of *The Weekly Epoch* deal. However, two hundred and forty dollars was two hundred and forty dollars.

Lawyer Chew handed to Christopher Shoots the original transfer deed.

“An’ now, Editor Shoots, lemme be the fust one to comgratulate you on yo’ new occurrence and enterprise. I wishes you luck.”

Editor Shoots! Christopher P. S. left the Penny Prudential Bank Building with his head in the skies and his fingers itching to clutch a pencil for the first editorial which was to be hurled forth to the world under his signature. Editor Shoots! In the glory of such a title even Lorelie was temporarily forgotten.

But if Lawyer Chew had effected that which caused Editor Shoots to daydream of dithyrambic editorials the attorney himself was by no means idle in affairs concerning the Shoots family and its misadventures. He telephoned Bud Peaglar’s Barbecue Lunch Room and Billiard Parlor and interrupted a hectic game of Kelly pool in which Mr. Slappey was a signal and unenthusiastic loser. Florian bade the game farewell and journeyed to the lawyer’s office. He graciously accepted a gold-banded cigar, drew down his glorious cuffs so that they

showed large below the coat sleeves and invited Lawyer Chew to shoot. Lawyer Chew shot.

“If’n I was in the way of puttin’ you onto makin’ a hund’ed an’ twen’y-five dollars fo’ yo’-se’f an’ ditto fo’ a frien’ of yourn ’thout doin’ no wuk, Mistuh Slappey, would it be wuth a ten puh cent commission to you?”

Florian’s eyes narrowed.

“Easy money?”

“Easy as eatin’ pork chops on a col’ night.”

Florian rose and started for the door.

“Nothin’ doin’, Lawyer Chew. I is had recent experience with shuah things an’ easy money an’ I’m off ’em fo’ life an’ a few days after that.”

“But the money is a’ready yourn, Mistuh Slappey, an—”

Florian Slappey seated himself. And if at the outset his attitude was one to tolerant indulgence it rapidly veered to an intense interest.

Lawyer Chew’s diagnosis of the case was simple and to the point, once stripped of its glittering verbiage. He explained that at the time Semore Mashby negotiated the deal with Christopher P. S. Shoots he was still agent for Florian Slappey and that his immediately subsequent purchase of the paper for himself in view of a deal made while his status of agent still existed was *per se* fraudulent an’ not wuth

nothin' a-tall. He explained further that Semore had since sold *The Weekly Epoch*.

"Sol' it?" interrupted Florian.

"Yeh."

"Who to?"

"Christopher P. S. Shoots."

Florian's paw dropped. Then his head went back and his teeth showed white. Florian laughed deliriously.

"My gosh!" roared he. "If that ain't the funnies' ever, then I never th'owed no Li'l' Phoebe in a crap game!"

Lawyer Chew continued with his story. The deed of conveyance, he explained, from Semore to Christopher showed that one thousand dollars was paid for the newspaper, even though only seven hundred and fifty dollars actually changed hands.

"But s'posin'," interjected Florian, "he gits balky an' won't stan' fo' no writin's which is wrong."

"Then all you has to do, Mistuh Slappey, is to siggist to him real clam an gentle that he c'n let it stan' that way, but that you will hafter staht proceedin's ag'in him fo' fraud, obtaining money under false pretenses, breach of trus' while actin' fo' you in a feeduciary capacity an' cetera an' so fo'th."

"I see," nodded Florian. "Go ahead, Law-

yer Chew; ev'y time you opens yo' mouth I heahs a dollar clink."

"All else you is got to do, Brother Slappey, is to show him that you c'n prove in a co't of law that he got an' received *The Weekly Epoch* as yo' agent an' that he sol' it fo' one thousan' dollars cash. 'Tain't true that he did, but you c'n prove it easy. An' mo'over he is gwine be skeered to make you do same. An' as them is the fac's he owes you half of all what he got over five hund'ed which is two hund'ed an' fifty, so he will pay you that, which will be profit fo' you an' yo' lady frien'. He won't lose nothin' an' ev'ybody will be happy."

Florian chuckled.

"Mebbe so ev'ybody won't, Lawyer Chew. But I know one man which will."

Mr. Slappey skidded from Lawyer Chew's office to the second floor below and into the musty dusty room occupied by Semore Mashby. The dialogue between the two gentlemen was brief, pointed and very, very personal. Florian followed the line of campaign laid down by Lawyer Chew and Semore followed his sense of discretion.

When Florian emerged a few minutes later he held in his hand Semore's check for two hundred and fifty dollars.

The bank was still open when Florian arrived.

He cashed his check and hurried back to Lawyer Chew's office, where he paid that super-enthusiastic and hard-working attorney twenty-five dollars in cash as a fee well earned. Then he went to Lorelie Shoots and placed in her hand one hundred and twenty-five dollars, which represented her share of the profits. Florian had sufficient grace not to tax her with fifty per cent of the lawyer's fee. He sensed that she had legal troubles of her own. But with the money tucked safely in her stocking Lorelie detained her star roomer.

"Jes' one minute, Mistuh Slappey! Jes' one li'l' teeny minute. I wishes to speak with you."

"Tell which?"

"You owes me twen'y dollars back room rent."

"My Gawd, woman, ain't you never satisfied?"

"Sometimes, but not yit. I is took my one chance an' I ain't never gwine take another."

Florian handed over the twenty. That joined her share of their profits. But even yet she was not finished with him.

"You also promised me six months' room rent in advance, Mistuh Slappey."

"Promises ain't cash."

"This one is gwine be."

She appeared determined, and Florian re-

flected unenthusiastically upon his dire need of the immediate past. With room rent paid six months in advance one of his chiefest worries would have been banished from his mind. He shelled out the sixty dollars.

"What else?" he inquired grimly.

"Nothin'," came the sweet retort, "'ceptin' on'y that yo' soot of mahogamy fu'niture gits removed into my room this evenin'."

Then Lorelie got busy settling the accounts which had so recently bidden fair to swamp her. She gave to the furniture dealer eighty-five dollars and procured in exchange a release in full on her bedroom suite. From there she made a smiling way to the office of Lawyer Chew, where she handed to that gentleman the twenty dollars remaining unpaid on his account. And with him she made an engagement for four o'clock.

"Yo' husban' an' Mistuh Slaphey is gwine be heah," said Chew significantly, "'an' they is gwine be a-plenty explanationin' done an' much happiness resultin', or I don't know less'n nothin'."

And in his office they assembled at four o'clock—Christopher and Lorelie casting covertly affectionate glances at one another, each eager for the word which would permit of mutual forgiveness; Florian a trifle uncertain

and Lawyer Evans Chew radiant in the spotlight of achievement.

Lawyer Chew called the meeting to order and started at the beginning. He explained that in the first place Editor Christopher P. S. Shoots, "my colleague in prefessional life," had been a trifle too hasty in suspecting his wife.

"Yassuh, she is, Editor Shoots, one of the mos' puffectest ladies I knows."

He made it clear that all of the secret conferences between Florian and Lorelie had the betterment of Editor Shoots as their objective.

"Yassuh, Editor Shoots, as a feller prefesional man, I rises to tell you that this whole thing was a plan to git you to buy the paper so's you would improve yo' social standin' from bein' a common barber. Ain't it so, Missis Shoots?"

"You is tootin', Lawyer Chew. You see, Christopher, honey, I was riskin' ev'ything so's you'd be better off in the end. An' look what I is done all by myse'f with the he'p of Lawyer Chew an' Brother Slappey! I is got one hund'ed dollars cash money clear, that bein' the balince of twenty dollars on the hund'ed an' twen'y-five dollars which Florian Slappey jes' give me a while ago, an' eight months' room rent which he done paid. I is paid fo' an' owns a hund'ed-an'-ten-dollar soot of mahogamy

fu'niture which goes into our bedroom t'-night. That makes two hund'ed an' ten dollars. You is bought fo' sevum hund'ed an' fifty dollars sumthin' you was gwine pay one thousan' dollars fo', which gives you two hund'ed an' fifty dollars clear profit.

"Lawyer Chew is got in fees as follers: Twen'y-five dollars each from me and you an' Brother Slappey an' ten dollars from Semore Mashby, makin' eighty-five dollars clear fo' him.

"Brother Slappey is got six months' room rent paid in advance, which is the same as sixty dollars in the bank, an' has twen'y dollars lef' after payin' Lawyer Chew's fee, so he wins eighty dollars.

"So you see, Christopher darlin', betwix' us which is in this heah room we is made six hun'ed an' twenty-five dollars an' they ain't no one los' anythin' 'ceptin' on'y Semore Mashby an' he on'y los' the ten dollars which he paid to Lawyer Chew fo' drawin' up the contrac'! What you think of that, Christopher?"

Christopher didn't think. He couldn't. From the maze of good fortune and staggering figures he had derived the title for a steaming editorial: The Age of Miracles Ain't Gone Yet. But though he didn't understand any of his wife's hectic accounting he was constitutionally un-

willing to be left entirely in the cold while individual glories were being passed round, and so he smiled in a very superior fashion.

“Huh!” said he. “Tha’s jes’ precisely the way I had it figgered out all the time!”

“You what?”

“Why shuah, Lorelie—deares’. If’n I hadn’t of knowed jes’ what you was tryin’ to do”—Christopher had the grace to avoid the amused stare of Lawyer Chew—“if’n I hadn’t of knowed jes’ what you was up to don’ you reckon I would of said sumthin’ when you drawed five hund’ed dollars out of our ’count?” He paused impressively. “Jes’ answer me that!”

And then Florian Slappey broke in. He did so smilingly, confidently.

“Huh!” he said, waving a comprehensive hand. “I reckon each of you folks is done yo’ best, but I is the one which is done the mos’. Not on’y was the fust-off idea mine, but is you-all ever stopped to think ’bout one thing—jes’ one thing?”

“Which is that?”

“Is you ever stopped to think that I fixed it so that the same five hund’ed dollars went an’ bought that newspaper twice?”

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FATTEST

LUCRESHUS MABRY threw back his head and proclaimed to the world in a seedy barytone that he was always blowing bubbles:

*They fly so high,
Might' nigh tech the sky;
Then like a dream
They bust an' die.*

The front wheels of the delivery truck which he was piloting collided violently with an excessively large rock and the car slewed drunkenly. The seven crates of ducks comprising the passenger list set up a unanimous quackery of protest. Lucreshus righted the car with a deft twist of the steering wheel and shook his head: "Might' nigh busted an' died my ownse'f that time."

The road curved sharply to the right and Lucreshus crossed three seconds ahead of a New Orleans express. He grinned cheerfully. "Lucreshus Mabry," he mused, "luck sho' ain't ag'in you to-day. That N'Yawlins train sho'

thought they was gwine be one mo' cullud angel answerin' the call on high."

But the narrow escape had caused a slight let-down in the Mabrian exuberance. No more did the raucous barytone split the clear warm air of the June morning. Lucreshus gave himself over to the business of driving his truck. He had been assigned to chaperon seven crates of ducks from Birmingham to Bessemer, and he entertained no overwhelming desire to become a corpse en route.

As for the ducks, they were blissfully ignorant of the fate in store for them. The morning was pleasant and the road generally good. What the ducks did not know was that a street fair had appeared in Bessemer the previous day and that they were destined for the sacrificial altar at one of the many raffling wheels.

The duck idea was always popular: "Three chances for ten cents, gents and ladies. You give me your dime and I gives you a ticket containing three numbers. Then I gives the little wheel a spin and somebody wins a fine live duck for ten cents. Think of it, gents and ladies—a fine roast duck for a dime! One little thin dime. A Canadian dime if you insist. Knock the old H. C. of L. in the head and watch it duck. A duck for a dime!"

The duck man had a good concession. On the

first day of the street fair he had been unable to obtain ducks and had managed to return fair dividends to himself with chickens and a few lorn geese. But a duck has infinitely more class than a chicken and is better understood than a goose, which was the reason why the owner of that particular concession had kept the telephone wires hot—at ten cents per heat—between Bessemer and Birmingham.

Eventually he swung a deal for seven crates of ducks. The selling firm was that Morris Avenue concern which claimed distinction by reason of the name “Lucreshus Mabry” on its pay roll. And to the very stout colorado-maduro-complexioned Lucreshus had been intrusted the task of delivering the ducks before ten-thirty A. M.

He negotiated the thirteen merciful miles which separate the first and fourth cities of Alabama in slightly less than fifty minutes, narrowly avoided extinction by an argument with a Jonesboro street car and swung at length into the broad street which pridefully displayed the street fair.

He brought his truck to a full stop and stared reminiscently at the double row of once-white tents—nickel-snatching devices and aristocratic two-bit attractions.

Spread out before him were the Wor’ruld

Famous Divin' Girls; The Wild West Dance Hall, You pay a nickel and you dance with the lady which you chooses; The Old Plantation Minstrels; The Wild West Show; The Only Original Hula Dancers, now also doing the shimmy; The Monkey Speedway; The Miniature City; The Motordrome; and, last and wealthiest, the score of booths where everything from kewpies to ducks was raffled.

Lucreshus remembered. Far back in the dim and distant past when he had been very small and very colored and very jobless, he had worked for five hectic months with a street-fair concession. His task had been to sit on a tiny platform which was suspended by an upright over a tub of cold and extremely wet water. There was a net in front of him and before the net a target which was connected by a trigger arrangement to the platform on which little Lucreshus sat. Thirty feet distant was a box, and in that box two score cheap baseballs. The price was a nickel—for three shots; the technic difficult but satisfying. It was merely a case of throwing with sufficient accuracy. That done, and the target hit, the trigger worked and Lucreshus was precipitated into the icy shallows below.

It was a fine thing for the owner of the concession and the person heaving the baseballs. To Lucreshus it had brought no surge of

ecstasy and but very little more than three meals a day. But it did bring him pneumonia. He stood for that, but when shortly after his recovery they played Anniston and the net split wide open and a ball caressed him in the eye Lucreshus struck.

His strike was successful. He retired permanently from the street-fair profession. So it was that when the fair passed on to Rome, Georgia, Lucreshus borrowed a ride in an otherwise empty box car and migrated to Birmingham.

And there he had since remained, time mellowing the recollection of his watery trials and tribulations and affording him no little distinction and a considerable fund of reminiscence as he made his way upward.

He was now most decidedly a man of parts, a dark-brown individual of acute dignity, social ease, sporting proclivities, ample girth and matrimonial tendencies. Attainment of position had come only after years of patient labor, but there is no denying a man with the quality of persistence demonstrated by Lucreshus in holding a job with a single firm for five years; and who, with such professional stability, carried sufficient cunning in the fingers of his right hand to roll sevens with uplifting and chronic frequency.

And until very recently Lucreshus had been hot on the trail of an ultimate social triumph. He laid ardent and almost successful court to Miss Zinnia Sanders, and until the arrival on the scene of the loungy, languid Angel Nash—

Lucreshus sighed ponderously and brought himself back to the task in hand. Immediately in his rear seven crates of ducks quacked volubly for attention. Lucreshus alighted and waddled down the midway. He found the duck man without particular trouble, checked over with him the number of prospective duck dinners and received payment in cash. Within a very short time the ducks were unloaded and placed within the raffle booth in preparation for the opening of the fair at two o'clock in the afternoon for the second day of its week's sojourn.

At the present moment, however, the street fair lounged in torpid desuetude. Performers, either without make-up or else with entirely too much of it, loafed before their tents swapping gossip which was saturated with a vernacular that Lucreshus thought he had forgotten, but which now came back to him in a pleasurable flood. He remembered his experiences of many years ago. He intercepted a large and burly gentleman who was headed due north and traveling fast.

“Boss man?”

The big fellow paused and eyed the fat and dusky Lucreshus. “What you want?”

“Is you got a baseball-th’owin’ concession roun’ this heah fair?”

“Yes.” The burly one jerked his head in the direction of the far end of the midway. “Down yonder.”

Lucreshus rambled heavily down the middle of the street, which municipal authorities had closed to traffic for the week. Every once in a while he paused and reflected. There were certain things that were startlingly familiar. Of course Lucreshus knew that all traveling street fairs are more or less alike; but there was something about that pink-silk-shirted spot-the-spot man, for instance; and the battered red-and-gold front of The Old Plantation Minstrels.

He reached the end of the midway—and then he knew. His was the beatitude of the successful man who returns to the village of his boyhood and meets the chap who once whipped him; meets him in his natural guise of the village loafer.

For there at the right of the midway was the very same platform upon which Lucreshus had sat many years before; the platform which had fallen before the onslaughts of light baseballs in good weather and bad, in hot weather and

cold. And loafing by its side perusing a thumbed copy of a large trade paper was Al Rossler.

It was the same old concession, and yet it was different. The tank was larger and wetter; the counter had been painted a bilious green and decorated with gold and silver. But the net—the same hole was there; the very hole through which had shot the ball that had expunged Lucreshus from the roster of the carnival. Of course there was a patch over the hole, and a good many patches elsewhere, but even at that the years had treated it more kindly than Al Rossler.

Al was paunchier, and though the diamond in his ring was larger and the silk of his fiery shirt of more substantial texture, Lucreshus felt a sense of superiority. Even so he had a fondness for his old employer. Al Rossler—big, bluff, good-natured Al—had an uncanny understanding of his dusky brethren and it was with real pleasure that he greeted his ex-employee.

For half an hour they retrospected violently; two old showmen come together again.

Lucreshus told of the affluence and prestige that had come to him along with his substantial embonpoint, and Mr. Rossler confessed that he was becoming fairly well fixed in this world's goods.

“Where you is been showin’ at right recint, Mistuh Rossler?”

Rossler checked off. “Ensley last week, Gadsden the week before, Chattanooga before that. And just before going to Chattanooga we had a wonderful three weeks in Knoxville.”

“Knoxville?” Lucreshus chuckled. “I is heahin’ a-plenty bouten Knoxville right recint.”

“How is that?”

“The cullud ball team from Knoxville is playin’ in Bummin’ham now. I is gwine win a heap of money outen this series.”

“Betting on the Birmingham team?”

“You done said it, boss. We is got the bestes’ cullud team which they is in the South. We win yestiddy’s game one to nothin’ in ’leven in-nin’s.”

Mr. Rossler laughed in good-natured derision. “I was in Knoxville for three weeks, Luke—”

“They calls me Lucreshus now, Mistuh Rossler.”

The white man’s face remained impassive. “I was there for three weeks, Lucreshus; and I saw two series of games played by the Knoxville team. They beat Nashville and won two out of five from Atlanta. Atlanta beat the Birmingham team three out of four—”

“We is a’ready win the fust game of the series from Knoxville, Mistuh Rossler; an’

winnin' another one ain't gwine be nothin' on'y chil's play."

"You may be a good truck driver, Luke—er—Lucreshus, but as a dopester you're nix. The Knoxville team lost the series to Atlanta by a fluke. They can beat Birmingham without half trying."

"You ain't know what you is talkin' 'bout, suh. Beatin' teams liken to this Knoxville team is the easiest thing we does."

"You're not willing to bet that way, are you?"

"Ain't I jes? I is done bet ev'y cent I c'n beg or borry on t'-day's game."

"Better hedge, Lucreshus. You haven't a chance."

"Ain't got a chance to lose! Lis'en heah, boss man. If'n you seen that series betwix' Knoxville an' Atlanta, does you 'member a Atlanta pitcher named Angel Nash? A soht of a lopsided feller with six gol' teeth?"

Rossler laughed. "Nobody could forget him. He's a corker."

Lucreshus looked round cautiously and lowered his voice. "We is got him!"

"Angel Nash?"

"You said it, boss. We hired him bouten two weeks ago to pitch two games outen th'ee ag'in Knoxville. He is be'n practicin' with us sence

then. An', b'lieve me, he is got mo' speed'n a cyclone an' better control 'n a preacher. What he pitches is named baseball. N'r neither he di'n't pitch yestiddy, 'countin' we was savin' him up fo' the last two games. He is gwine twirl t'-day an' t'-morry, an' what we is gwine do to that Knoxville team gwine make 'em feel 'bout as happy as a man drawin' his las' will an' testimony."

Rossler shook his head stubbornly. "A pitcher can't win the game alone. The whole Knoxville team is good. And their new pitcher is even better than Angel Nash."

"Says which?"

"The Knoxville pitcher is even better than Angel Nash."

"Haw!" responded Lucreshus with ponderous sarcasm. "If'n they's any pitcher in the world better'n Angel, Ise a blushin' blond."

Al Rossler laughed heartily. "Same old Luke, aren't you, Lucreshus? I know this much—I'd like to lay fifty at even on Knoxville for to-day's game."

"Huh! Tha's 'bout the easies' thing which they is."

With a single deft motion Al Rossler produced a bulging wallet, from which he extracted five ten-dollar bills. "Take this with you and place it for me—on Knoxville."

“You ain’t in earnes’, boss man?”

“I am.”

Lucreshus extended a restraining hand. “Don’, cap’n; don’ go an’ do nothin’ foolish liken to that. If’n yo’ money is jes’ nachelly bu’nin’ a hold in yo’ pocket gimme it. Bettin’ agin the team which we is got is bad ’nough, but when we also is got Angel Nash to pitch fo’ us this afternoon an’ done beat ’em yestiddy ’thouten him—they mus’ be sumthin’ in the Alabama air, Cap’n Rossler, which is done went to yo’ haid.”

But Al Rossler was insistent. He had seen the Knoxville colored team play and had unbounded confidence in its powers. In the end he forced Lucreshus to take the money. Lucreshus sighed. “I wish I had ’nough money to cover it my ownse’f.”

“Haven’t you?”

“Lis’en heah at me, Cap’n Rossler: If’n they’s a nickel in all of Bummin’ham which is gittable by me an’ which same I ain’t done got then I don’ know it. An’ it’s all bet on Bummin’ham to win this afternoon’s game. They ain’t nary chance to lose. Tha’s why I hates to see you th’owin’ ’way yo’ money liken to this. Now you take me: Gawd knows I hates Angel Nash—”

“Hate him?”

“You said it; an’ I repeats ditto. But he sho’ly is one hell-bendin’ pitcher, an’—”

“Why do you hate Angel Nash?”

“Hm!” Lucreshus’ eyes dropped and he traced a design in the dust with a broad-toed shoe. “I soht of got a grudge agin him.”

“Why?”

“It’s this-away, boss man. He soht of done me dirt. He’s went an’ cut me out with my gal.”

“A-a-ah! A rival of yours?”

“Tha’s which. I is almos’ but not quite engage’ to Miss Zinnia Sanders, which is one of the quality cullud gals of Bummin’ham, an’ things is being goin’ elegant. Then we goes an’ hires Angel Nash to come heah an’ pitch fo’ us, an’ Zinnia remembers she has met him when the Atlanta team was playin’ heah an’ he was beatin’ us. An’ what I is tellin’ you, Cap’n Rossler, is that my gal Zinnia is one mo’ baseball fan. If’n they’s a stitch on a baseball’s hide she cain’t call by its fust name, then I ain’t never saw it. If’n she would of been bohn a man she would of been a cullud Ty Cobb. An’ with her feelin’ liken that ’bouten baseball, what she thinks of a winnin’ pitcher like Angel Nash is a-plenty. Specially with me bein’ soht of fat.

“Besides an’ also, Angel is one of them fellers which is jes’ natchelly got a way with wim-

min. I b'lieve he could make his ma'-in-law love him if'n he had one an' if'n he was fool 'nough to want to. An' sence he is been practicin' with the Bummin'ham team I ain't had no mo' chance with Zinnia Sanders than what a roastin' pig is got in a nigger's back yard roun' Christmas time. Tha's how come me to love Angel so much like I don't, but it don't go to my haid an' make me foolish. Bettin' on that man to lose is 'bout as safe as stickin' yo haid in a zoo lion's mouth roun' lunch time. So you'd better take this fifty dollars back, boss."

But the white man waved it aside. "You bet it for me, Lucreshus. It's a good bet even if I lose."

"It's sho' gwine be a good bet then, boss."

"I'm taking the chance," reassured Rossler.

Lucreshus sighed and pocketed the fifty dollars. He was still sighing regretfully as he finished the last leg of his journey to Birmingham and parked his car on Morris Avenue. He turned over to the bookkeeper the cash received in payment for the truckload of ducks, reminded his boss that he had been promised leave for the afternoon and departed. He made his way to Bud Peaglar's Barbecue Lunch Room and Billiard Parlor, where he inhaled a few savory sandwiches and two steaming cups of coffee.

The atmosphere of the pool room was vibrant with baseball gossip. The long and limpy Bud was in conference with Boston Marble, a melancholy gambling agent. It was patent from the conversation that there was very little Knoxville money in sight. The defeat of the previous day without the help of the mighty whip of Angel Nash had served to chasten the spirits of the Knoxville betting fraternity. Lucreshus started unhappily across the smoke-laden room toward Boston Marble, fat chocolate fingers wound round the fifty dollars intrusted to his care by Mr. Al Rossler, his one-time employer. Then he hesitated. He continued to hesitate, and continuing he was lost. He lounged back to the corner and dropped into a wicker chair.

After all was said and done, Mr. Rossler had been a good friend to Lucreshus in the days when the little brown boy needed a friend. True, he had shoved off on Lucreshus a job that developed into pneumonia, but he had also nursed him through the illness and defrayed all medical expenses when he might have deserted him. And it was an infernal shame, reflected Lucreshus, to jes' nachelly th'ow away fifty good hard dollars belongin' to his ve'y bestes' white frien'.

Lucreshus knew that he ought to obey orders; execute his commission and let the sadness fall

where it listeth. But he hadn't the heart. More, he knew that Mr. Rossler was a very liberal individual—terrible in wrath, but generous in peace—and he envisioned a triumphal entry into the booth of Mr. Rossler that night after the Knoxville team should have bitten much dust for the second consecutive time. Mr. Rossler would be downhearted over the loss of his money, at which psychological moment Lucreshus would thrust under his nose the unwagered fifty dollars, saying: "See heah what I is done made fo' you by not losin' it as you ast me to do."

Twenty-five dollars would be a conservative fee, thought Lucreshus—and the die was cast.

When Lucreshus Mabry and a rather reluctant Zinnia Sanders boarded the trolley for Rickwood Park at two-thirty that afternoon fifty dollars belonging to Mr. Al Rossler rested securely in the pockets of Mr. Mabry's new seven-dollar pants. And despite the apathy of the pretty brown girl at his side Mr. Mabry's spirits were away up.

The cup that he was planning to quaff that afternoon contained a bitter-sweet draught. Fortunately there was much more of the sweet than the bitter. True, Angel Nash would not only exhibit his undeniable skill as a pitcher of baseball but he would be winning a crucial game for the team which Zinnia loved. On the other hand, while Angel was winning the game and the

approval of their common lady love he would be piling money into the coffers of Lucreshus Mabry. Hence the predominance of the sweet.

When the car pulled up before the imposing entrance of Rickwood Park—home grounds of the Birmingham Southern League team—Lucreshus was glad of the perspicacity which had prompted him to purchase his box seats at Bud Peagler's.

Long lines had formed before each of the ticket windows and the merry clink of silver half dollars blended harmoniously with the eager chatter of the Afro-American fans. Inside, the grand stand was rapidly filling. Save for a small section in the general direction of third base which was reserved for white people, the enormous stand was jammed with a press of yellow-to-black humanity. Every notable was there in force: Vanguard Collins; Mr. and Mrs. Christopher P. S. Shoots; Mr. and Mrs. Anopheles Ricketts; Luscious Chester; Mrs. Spinola Reed-Chester; Belshazzer Elliott, Grand Magnificent High Potentate of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise; Mr. and Mrs. Quintus Weefalls; Lawyer Evans Chew; Dr. Vivian Simmons; Mrs. Dr. Elijah Atcherson and husband; Hammond Bias; Jerry Skillet; Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Gethers; Keefe Gaines; Cupid Baldon; Dr. and Mrs. Brutus Herring;

Acey Upshaw; Ellick Pinckney; Semore Mashby, who had managed to work a pass from someone and then slip by the gate without paying his war tax; Reverend Wesley Luther Thigpen and his contemporary of the First African M. E. Church, the Reverend Plato Tubb; Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Broughton and—of course—Florian Slappey, misogynistically alone.

They were out en masse; the worth while and the worthless, the high and the low, aristocrat and proletarian, the degreed and pedigreed. The grand stand was a riot of vivid coloring—shrieking yellows, gorgeous reds, unctuous lavenders, palpitant purples, staggering blues. On the top row of the grand stand was the orchestra of Professor Alec Champagne, which worked overtime spurting jazzy music into the innocent summer air.

Out on the field the two teams disported themselves idly, languidly dipping after grounders and casually pulling in long flies, product of the fungo-hitters' skill. Then came the regular preliminary practice: an affair of brilliant stops, excessive comedy and rank errors. Team for team, exclusive of the battery superiority, Knoxville and Birmingham seemed a toss-up. But there was no forgetting the battery.

A stentorian-voiced umpire announced the batteries, and at the mention of Angel Nash's

name a scream of delight rent the air. That gentleman rose from the dugout and bowed smilingly, showing a wide expanse of shiny white-and-gold teeth. And when he strolled into the box bedlam broke loose, and Lucreshus felicitated himself on the fact that he had not thrown away Mr. Rossler's money by betting it against this hurling phenom. It gave him his opportunity of helping his friend of former days—even against the latter's will.

There was something about Angel Nash as he faced the breast-protected and masked catcher which infused confidence. It was not precisely an indifference to his surroundings. Rather it was a contempt of them. The idea that this team from Knoxville should even presume to send batters up against him seemed amusing to Angel and he wore a large golden grin. He lobbed three over the pan and signaled the umpire that he was ready.

The first Knoxville batter tapped twice on the rubber with his heavy bat, set himself, swung at two swift ones and then at dead floater which seemed retarded in the air. He retired in disgust. The second batter swiped at two, concluded that the third would be wasted, discovered very quickly that he had made an error of judgment—and he too sat down. The third met the second ball squarely and slammed it in the

general direction of center field. It hit the ground midway between the plate and the pitcher's box and bounced.

There was a resounding smack as ball struck glove and remained there. The batter started frantically for first. Angel Nash regarded the ball in his hand speculatively, allowed the runner a sporting start and then tossed the ball gracefully to the first sacker. Then Birmingham came in.

But Knoxville was on edge. It had played well against the team which had beaten Birmingham and it had no mind to lose two straight games. It played steady businesslike baseball, and the locals were retired in one-two-four order.

For six innings the rival twirlers gave masterly exhibitions. Neither allowed a hit, and only one man reached third. In the last half of the seventh the first batter for Birmingham fanned. Then Angel Nash strolled with rare insouciance to the plate, selected a ball and hit over second for two easy bases. And first among those who leaped up and screamed was Miss Zinnia Sanders.

Lucreshus was financially enthusiastic, but the exhibition on the part of his lady friend ruffled his dignity and riled his feelings. He fastened strong fingers about her dimpled arm

and caused her to reseal herself with extreme suddenness. She swung on him in fury.

"Take yo' han's off'n me, cullud man!"

"You is makin' a specktickler outen yo'se'f."

"I reckon it's my own specktickler—an' 'sides, 'tain't none of yo' business."

"Folks is lookin' at you."

"They is lookin' at sumthin' when they does."

"You makes me 'shame' of myse'f."

"Well, blame yo' own fat se'f for that."

Lucreshus became aware of the fact that he was pursuing a rather tactless course. "I ain't meant to make you mad."

"Ain't meant ain't ain't did."

"On'y jes' causen a man goes an' flukes a two-bagger—"

"Flukes! Huh! I reckon you could of done it too."

"Ise a business man—not no ball player."

"Pity you is an' pity you ain't. Now you remove yo' han's off'n me an' lemme root liken I likes."

Mr. Angel Nash bowed response to the applause of the stands, kidded with a superior air the shortstop, who was covering the base, and languidly strolled from the sack for a long lead toward third. He noticed vaguely that the coach on the third base line was making gro-

tesque gestures and uttering weird cries, but he didn't bother particularly.

The Knoxville pitcher whirled; the ball shot straight to second and into the waiting hands of the second baseman, who had sneaked up unobserved. And to Angel Nash came the greatest disgrace in baseballdom: He was caught asleep off the base.

His march in from the center of the diamond was not exactly a triumphal procession. And at least one man in the stands was chuckling.

"I reckon, Zinnia, that he is a swell base runner, also pitcher."

Zinnia's nose went high in the air. "You is entitled to yo' own reckons, Mistuh Mabry."

"An' 'tain't no harm to be 'spicuous by yo' rootin', is it?"

"I said it."

"Ve'y well." Lucreshus Mabry rose to his feet and his barytone rolled out across the field and thrummed into the ears of the chagrined Angel Nash: "Some ball player you is—not!"

The ninth inning came and went. In the tenth Knoxville scored and Birmingham managed to even things. The eleventh resulted in two large goose eggs on the scoreboard. But in the first half of the twelfth something happened.

It was plain that the first batter was ball shy. He stood back from the plate and refused

to strike at an ice-cream ball which floated up tantalizingly. A chorus of hoots from the stands lent courage and he crowded the plate. And Angel caught the ball which his catcher returned, posed airily, wound up lavishly and let fly.

There was a sharp crack as the ball connected with the crest of the batter's cranium and bounced merrily over the grand stand. The batter looked round, grinned and trotted unconcernedly to first. Angel, hands on hips, shook with laughter. With no one down and a man on first the Knoxville manager sent in a pinch hitter, an enormously large and intransigently black gentleman who swung a Brobdingnagian bat over his shoulder. He had orders to play the hit-and-run game.

Angel chuckled good-naturedly: "Hello, Useless!"

The pinch hitter glared. He stood at the plate.

Suddenly the ball left Angel's hand. It cut the heart of the platter and the umpire announced a strike.

"You is 'lowed to hit at 'em," announced Angel sweetly.

"Shut yo' fool mouth!" grated the batter.

Angel ignoring the man on first wound up deliberately. The ball appeared to leave his hand

with terrific speed. The batter swung, spun and almost fell. "Stri-i-ike tuh!" Angel laughed.

"Ain't you learn' to stan' alone yit?"

"Open yo' mouth ag'in an' you is gwine be a angel sho' 'nough!"

Angel speared the return. Heah you is, Nothin'! Heah's one right over the plate."

"You woul'n't dare!"

"Watch this!" The ball shot in. But just before it reached the plate it broke sharp and wide. The swinging bat missed it by six inches, and there came a roar of laughter from the grand stand. Angel received his catcher's return and motioned the batter aside.

"Go ast yo' manager ain't he got no real batter to send up heah."

The giant Knoxvilleian started menacingly toward the box, swinging his bat and swearing elegantly. The adoring smile never left the face of Angel Nash. He stood quietly fingering the ball.

"Cullud man," he remarked conversationally, "my control is good an' my speed is siz-zlin'!"

The big man turned sullenly and retreated to his dugout while Angel inspected the cleats of his shoes. He was as calm as a church deacon at an ice-cream festival.

The next batter up laid a pretty bunt down the first-base line, sacrificing the runner to second. The man who followed him shot one to third and the third sacker threw wild to first, leaving first and third occupied, with two men down. The few Knoxville fans awakened and rooted.

The first ball went straight over. The bat met it squarely. It sailed like an arrow to center field. The center fielder braced himself for the catch. The ball hit his glove, hung uncertainly for a moment, and then oozed over the side.

There was a deep and hollow groan from the Birmingham stands as the runner crossed the pan. That ended Knoxville's scoring for the inning.

But the one-run lead was sufficient. One Birmingham runner reached second, but there he expired. And slowly and solemnly the crowd rose to its feet and started for the exits.

But Lucreshus Mabry did not rise. Save for a weak remark to Zinnia: "Swell pitcher you is lovin'," he made no comment on the catastrophe.

He couldn't. The disaster beggared description. The ultimate cataclysm had occurred. With Angel Nash in the box, backed by a superior team, Birmingham had yet gone down to inglorious defeat. It mattered not that the box

score showed that it was Birmingham's game throughout, that Angel had twirled winning ball and lost only by the combination of a fluke and an error—the stark fact remained that every available cent of cash or credit which Lucreshus possessed had been swept away by black magic.

And then a poignant memory smote Lucreshus. It smote him hard and smote him frequent.

Mr. Al Rossler.

In the pants pocket of Lucreshus Mabry reposed fifty dollars belonging to Mr. Al Rossler, which at that moment should have blossomed forth as one hundred. For that was the fifty which had been intrusted to Lucreshus to wager for his friend on the chances of the Knoxville team. And he found himself hoist by the petard of his friendly effort to present his friend with a half-century note and perhaps receive a substantial honorarium in appreciation of his superior judgment.

Lucreshus Mabry was rapidly arriving at realization of the fact that he was up against it about as hard as one colored man can be and yet continue to exist. Even the obvious warmth of his lady friend did little to assuage the great gob of grief that enveloped him. Every nickel he owned or was likely to own had been swept

away by the inexcusable bobble of a center fielder.

Eventually Lucreshus rose. Zinnia held his arm tightly. It was patent that Mabry stock had risen materially in the face of a Nash defeat. But Lucreshus was ponderously unhappy. He was about as superlatively unhappy as it was possible for him to become. They passed through the grand stand to the exit gate, the tail enders of a saddened sorrowful throng of erstwhile enthusiastic rooters. Near the gate they came face to face with Angel Nash.

But it was a different Angel Nash, an Angel stripped of his incomparable poise, an Angel heroically striving to keep up the appearance which was his by right and which an error had stolen.

Angel bowed. "Evenin', Miss Zinnia."

"Evenin', Mistuh Nash," came the response in a tone so cool that it would normally have brought an access of exultation to Lucreshus.

"That was a pow'ful hahd-luck game, wa'n't it, Miss Zinnia?"

Lucreshus sniffed. "Hahd luck? Huh! A man which cain't pitch an' cain't run bases gittin' to talk 'bouten hahd luck!"

Angel glared. "I wa'n't directin' nothin' at you, Mistuh Mabry."

“No—an’ you wa’n’t directin’ nothin’ at the plate neither.”

“You is gettin’ pussonal, Mistuh Mabry.”

“Yeh, an’ tha’s all what I is gittin’ after the game you played.”

Angel turned his attention to the girl again. “You ain’t so’ at me, is you, Miss Zinnia?”

“I is mo’ sorrier than so’.”

“They ain’t nobody cain’t he’p bein’ sorry fo’ a poor fish liken to what you is, Mistuh Nash,” interjected Lucreshus.

Angel swung upon him. There was an expression on Angel’s face that was unmistakably not of the heavenly regions. “One mo’ word liken to that, Mistuh Mabry, an’ you is gwine to be ain’t!”

Lucreshus sized his man up and decided that discretion assayed about 99% the better part of valor at that exact moment. He made no answer and continued to make it. He and his lady friend passed mournfully through the gate and boarded a city-bound baseball special. In the car Zinnia snuggled close to him.

“You seems pow’ful depressed, Mistuh Mabry.”

“Depressed is happy compared to what I is.”

“Seems like you wouldn’t be.”

“How come?”

“With Mistuh Nash losin’ his game that-away.”

“I was rootin’ for him to win!” snapped Lucreshus.

“Knowin’ that I was rootin’ too?”

“Wimmin an’ baseball don’t mix none in my min’, Zinnia. One is a pleasure an’ t’other is a business.”

“Which one is the business?”

Silence fell between them, and Lucreshus miserably passed up his most glorious opportunity for rehabilitation in the eyes of his lady love. It was all that Lucreshus could do to retain his veneer of dignity—and dignity was Lucreshus’ greatest asset.

He was sad at heart. Mr. Al Rossler loomed up about as large as a mountain and as fearsome as a thundercloud. Thought of the fifty he should have won for his white friend was staggering. It was bad enough to have lost every cent he possessed, but to be fifty dollars in the hole in addition thereto—

He conceived wild and futile schemes for borrowing fifty dollars and turning it over to Mr. Rossler. There was no more chance of his being able to raise more than five dollars than there was of his marrying Zinnia that night. He was buried deep in an earthly cavity of his own digging, poignantly and painfully aware of the fact.

He was in a ferment when he left Zinnia abruptly at the door of her own home. He ambled sadly downtown, reflecting upon the disaster which had come to him and plotting weird and impractical methods of escape. A sudden and informal departure from Birmingham was impossible for several reasons, not the least of which was the total lack of funds. He conceived the plan of making himself considerably scarce until the street fair should have departed from Bessemer for another town, but he knew that that, too, was not sound. Mr. Rossler was a kind and indulgent white gentleman until he got the idea that somebody was trying to put something over on him. Then—Lucreshus shuddered.

He clenched his pudgy fists and shrugged his flabby shoulders. There was plainly nothing for him to do but face the music; to go to Bessemer, turn the fifty dollars back to Mr. Rossler and make a complete confession. He paused. Suppose Mr. Rossler should get the idea that he had wagered and won, and was holding out fifty? Well—after all that was the smallest risk he was running.

One hour later he alighted from a North Bessemer street car and made his mournful way toward the glare and glitter of the street fair. It stood out in blaring colorful contrast to its sodden drabness of the morning.

The street was a blaze of light and thronged with black and white humanity. There is something about a street fair in the South which does more to bridge the social gap separating the races than any other one thing. Quality white folks, laughing-eyed and traveling in large joyous parties, rubbed elbows with their ebony cooks and washer-women. They crowded together at the raffling booths, chancing their nickels and dimes on candies, live ducks, large and pop-eyed dolls, Indian-blanket robes.

The riding concessions were doing a land-office business; one-third of the cars of the Ferris wheel were, for instance, being occupied by jolly care-free white people of the society crowd, who were doing the fair in large groups; the remaining two-thirds filled with their Ethiopian brethren. Ballyhoo men roared the quality of their wares—designating rows of flashily costumed, infinitely bored young ladies as proof of their contention of superiority. It was an anarchy of light, blatant music, high-pitched laughter, racial intermingling, general hilarity—a scene typically Southern and wholly bizarre.

But Lucreshus looked upon the surging laughing crowd, the glaring lights, the wholesome joy—and found little to lift his spirits

from the slough into which they had descended. He headed for the concession belonging to Mr. Al Rossler at the far end of the midway, but there was a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm in his gait. He was headed for a conversational guillotine.

But even the worst of things must end eventually, and he came to Mr. Rossler's booth. It was suffering from a complete collapse of enthusiasm. No crowd gathered before the counter eagerly depositing nickels for three chances to duck the sad little negro who sat perched on the seat over the galvanized-iron tub. Lucreshus looked and understood. The person who pays his nickel and hits the target likes to feel that he is bringing distress to the duckee, and the little fellow on the platform could not possibly have looked more woe-begone than he already did had they heaved him into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

But the very dearth of business was disastrous for Lucreshus. Mr. Rossler being sans work found time hanging heavy on his hands and he spotted Lucreshus and summoned that melancholy gentleman to his presence. Mr. Rossler, his prophecy fulfilled, was grinning genially.

“Told you about that Knoxville team, Luke.”

“Yassuh—you sho’ did.”

"I'm surprised it took them twelve innings to do it."

"So is I."

"Broke you, didn't they?"

Lucreshus nodded emphatically. "Broke is rich compared to what I is."

Mr. Rossler laughed. "Your pitcher friend was defeated; that ought to put you in strong with your mutual lady friend."

"I ain't studyin' 'bouten no gals, Mr. Rossler."

"Don't you worry, Luke. I'm fifty dollars ahead of the game, and—you brought my winnings down with you, didn't you?"

Lucreshus gulped, strangled, shivered—and then took the plunge. In frantic, adjectival, apologetic speech he explained to Mr. Rossler that he had known all along that Knoxville didn't have a chance to win and he couldn't bear to see fifty dollars thrown away.

"An' so, boss man, I ain't bet yo' money a-tall!"

"Didn't bet it?"

"Nossuh. Not on Knoxville n'r neither Bummin'ham." He fished the fifty from his pocket. "Heah 'tis, suh, an' I'se sorry that Knoxville won, an'—"

Mr. Rossler was not precisely angry, but he most decidedly was peeved. It was exactly as

though he had had fifty dollars taken from his pocket. He stared at Lucreshus for a few minutes and then commenced to speak.

His speech was more graphic than elegant. He started with the creation and said things which bore directly on the quality of Lucreshus' ancestry from the days of Ham to the present; none of which were exactly laudatory. Pausing only briefly for breath he started in with the forthcoming generations and damned them heartily even unto the days of the millennium. When he paused it was only because he had exhausted his vocabulary of descriptive profanity.

Through it all Lucreshus cowered and trembled. Gone was the exquisite dignity which had won him recognition in Birmingham, and there had crept into his heart a horrible fear, a terror of consequences. Visions of the county jail known to the negroes as the Big Rock, loomed before him, and he quivered.

"Please, suh, boss man, I di'n't go fo' to do you no dirty trick. Please, suh, don' tell no p'lice 'bouten what I done. Ise gwine save up an' pay you back them fifty dollars an'—"

"You're not going to do anything of the kind; you're going to take your medicine and you're going to take it now!"

"Nossuh! Please, suh, I ain't meant to—"

Mr. Rossler transfixed him with a glare. He

looked to the petrified Lucreshus like a man contemplating murder. What the overly ample and entirely elegant colored man did not know was that inside his red-and-white-striped shirt Mr. Al Rossler was laughing!

Mr. Rossler turned away and motioned to the little negro on the platform in the cage. That individual scampered down the ladder and presented himself before his employer.

"You've got a vacation this evening," announced the owner of the concession. "Here's four bits. Have a good time."

Lucreshus stared. A hint of the diabolical punishment in store sent a tremor of apprehension through him. He started to say something but Rossler cut him short and motioned toward the diving seat.

"Get up yonder!"

"B-b-but, boss man —"

"Take your choice: that or the calaboose—"

Lucreshus looked at Mr. Rossler, glanced at the seat over the tank of water and envisioned the Big Rock. He adopted the wisest course. He started to remove his coat and hat.

"Keep 'em on!" snapped Mr. Rossler. "You're going to bring me fifty dollars worth of business to make up for the money you failed to win for me. If there's a person on this midway who won't be willing to shell out a quar-

ter for the chance of ducking you, then I'm no showman."

It was a thoroughly pathetic Lucreshus Mabry who again, after the lapse of many years, climbed upon the platform and gazed apprehensively into the yawning tub beneath. True, his plight was not nearly so bad as it might have been, especially since Bessemer, though only thirteen miles removed from Birmingham, is actually as far away as Jersey City is from New York. There was a minimum of chance that his disgrace would become public property to ruin him socially in the city of his choice. It was merely, then, a case of taking his wet and bitter medicine.

The stentorian voice of Mr. Al Rossler belled forth in impassioned ballyhoo. A party of white people drifted up, turned away, and then, noticing the sartorial elegance of the figure on the platform, planked down a dime and took six baseballs. Lucreshus braced himself for the sudden giving way of his seat and the plunge into the waters below. But the white men were poor pitchers and he was temporarily safe.

But meanwhile others had come up toward the concession and now a burly brown chap bought three balls and missed with the first two. But his aim was improving. The third ball went straight as an arrow against the target, the

trigger gave, the seat ditto. There was a splash, a roar of laughter, and a terrible "Whoosh!" from Mr. Lucreshus Mabry as he became immersed in the icy shallows.

He climbed lumbrously and abjectly back to his seat, acutely conscious of the genuine amusement of Al Rossler and the now thickening crowd of patrons.

Another man tried his aim, and then another and another. The spirit of the thing became infectious and business picked up as fast as Lucreshus could climb from the water to the platform.

And then when he had been ducked a score of times and the numbing ignominy of his position had become bearable by familiarity much of his old professional aplomb returned. He was doused regularly and commenced to take it calmly, acquiring a contemptuous impersonal interest in the crowd which paid well for his discomfort.

An hour passed; thirty minutes more. It had become a habit by this time. Lucreshus was distant and aloof. His disinterestedness dulled the earnestness of his tormentors and they gradually drifted away, seeking more zestful diversion. Once in a while a new couple ambled up and tried their luck. Lucreshus had become fatly and utterly indifferent. The ordeal was just about finished; his debt paid.

Suddenly he sat up very straight. His eyes seemed about to pop from his head, his jaw sagged and a low groan of unspeakable woe issued from between his lips. His eyes bored into the dusky throng of the midway and met another pair. In the clashing glances there was an admixture of amusement, surprise, fear and joy.

The other pair of eyes belonged to Mr. Angel Nash, pitcher for the Birmingham Colored Baseball Association!

And with Mr. Nash leaning confidently on his mighty arm was Miss Zinnia Sanders!

Lucreshus groaned again. The ghastly quintessence of disgrace had arrived all in a bunch. What had before this seemed like disaster now appeared bright and cheerful by contrast. Angel Nash and Zinnia! What weird caprice of a malevolent fate had directed them to the Bessemer street fair Mr. Mabry did not know. All that he did know was that they were there, that he recognized in his misery that they were coming toward him, startled surprise in the eyes of Miss Zinnia Sanders and unholy glee in those of Mr. Angel Nash.

For one brief instant Lucreshus considered flight. Then he reconsidered. The damage was done. To him there came a feeling of morbid satisfaction. He knew what he was in for, and he was grimly determined to make the best of it.

But he also knew that all matrimonial bets were off. By morning Birmingham would seethe with the tale of his degradation; the dignified Lucreshus Mabry a target for baseballs, a huge human duck, a three-for-a-nickel street-fair employee. A cloud of grief settled about his shoulders in a damp soggy mantle. He scarcely heard the cheerful greeting of Angel Nash.

“Evenin’, Mistuh Mabry.”

Angel purchased a quarter’s worth of balls; fifteen of them. “You ain’t never tol’ me you wuk’d heah.”

Lucreshus hung his head in shame. He heard a low-toned remark made by Angel to Zinnia, and sensed that it was not complimentary to him. Then Angel spoke again: “How does you prefer to hit that water, Mistuh Mabry, sittin’ or lyin’?”

No answer from Lucreshus. His figure was slumped forward in piteous abandon to an unkind fate. He awaited the smack of the ball against the target.

Angel Nash took aim. He wound up elaborately. Then he threw. He didn’t use much speed, but he had plenty of control. The ball hit the target, but there was not sufficient force behind it to release the trigger. The next time Angel used more smoke.

There was a jar, a splash, a gurgle—and as Lucreshus emerged from the depths he heard the harsh biting laugh of Miss Zinnia Sanders.

He took his place doggedly, sullenly. Within fifty cents' worth of shots it became plainly evident to him that Mr. Angel Nash was an exceedingly good pitcher. Life was just one dam-ducking after another; a succession of ups and downs—up on the platform, down in the water.

Mr. Nash was in fine fettle. So was the crowd, which was growing ever denser about him. Lucreshus heard a man in the mob address Angel, who was reveling in the spotlight:

“Ain't you the pitcher on the Bummin'ham cullud team?”

“I is.”

“Does you know that nigger yonder?” pointing to Lucreshus.

But it was Zinnia who answered for herself and for Angel: “We ain't neither of us knows him pussonal. I think he useter wuk in Bummin'ham.”

Lucreshus gave it up as a bad job. She had pronounced the death sentence. He had nothing further to lose.

Angel shot one into the canvas. Lucreshus raised a sarcastic voice: “Did you say you was a pitcher?”

“I did, Mistuh Mabry.”

“Then why’n you pitch? What you ain’t got is no speed n’r neither no cumtrol.”

“Ain’t I? Ain’t I jes’? You watch this, cul-lud man.”

Angel wound up elaborately, and suddenly out of the maze of arms shot a fast one, a fearfully fast one. It looked like it was going to miss the target by six inches—until it took a sudden break, and Lucreshus kersplashed into the wetness. Zinnia led the salvo of laughter which rang out as he unimmersed himself and climbed grimly upward for another douse.

“Accident,” he taunted Angel. “You cain’t do it ag’in.”

But Angel could. And what’s more to the point he did, the crowd applauding now, greeting each precipitation of the portly Mr. Mabry with laughter ever more uproarious. As for Al Rossler, he stood by raking in the shekels with an avid hand.

Angel showed every trick in his twirling repertoire.

“Heah you is, Mistuh Mabry—a fast one!” Splash! “An’ now, Brother Lucreshus, a slow out!” Flop! “A li’l inshoot fo’ yo’ health!” Slosh!

Lucreshus almost glorified his job. A new dignity sat upon his enormous martyred shoulders.

“Huh! Pitcher, you calls yo’s’e’f, does you? You ain’t no pitcher—you is a farm han’? You ain’t never done nothin’, Angel Nash, on’y pitch hay. Lookit what Knoxville done to you this afternoon.” Splash! Lucreshus shook himself and climbed up again. “Li’l mo’ speed, cul-lud man. You ain’t showed none when you got beat t’-day; Ise bettin’ you ain’t got none a-tall!”

“Speed?” Angel sneered. “Lis’en heah at me, Lucreshus. Tha’s the on’y thing I ain’t got nothin’ else but. Try this heah yout curve, fo’ instance. One—two—” Kerflop! Angel turned to Zinnia. “Ain’t he sumthin’ to sit on a platform, Miss Sanders? Ain’t he jes’?”

Zinnia laughed loud and ringingly. “You should worry ’bouten him. He ain’t nothin’ on’y a common lab’rer.”

The fun grew faster and furiously. If there was any trick in Angel’s bag which was not produced for the edification of the crowd no one would have guessed it. The overhand delivery, the side-arm heave, the ice-cream ball, the fast-breaking shoot—each did its share to add to the ignominy of the unfortunate on the platform.

But with each splash into the water Lucreshus won new friends in the crowd. The temper of the mob veered; it commenced applauding Lucreshus when Angel missed. And finally,

after spending more than two hours and a half before the stand and within two dollars and a half of his worldly capital, Angel Nash and Miss Zinnia Sanders moved away.

Lucreshus watched their departure apathetically. He had plumbed the nethermost depths of misery and the future was a thing of drab inconsequence. He saw Al Rossler walking toward him and heard Al Rossler's hearty voice:

"That's enough, Luke. You can climb down."

Lucreshus climbed, sore in body and crushed in spirit. Mr. Rossler extended something. "Here's a towel. Dry yourself off."

The broken Mr. Mabry raised pain-filled eyes to the man who had caused his multitudinous downfalls.

"Towel!" he scoffed. "I don't want no towel. I wants a windin' sheet!"

The following day things happened. They happened steadily and consistently, and they started in the third inning.

During the first two innings the mighty wing of Mr. Angel Nash and his hypnotic poise in the box combined to hold the Knoxville batters helpless. But suddenly without warning the fireworks started. When the smoke cleared away

seven Knoxville runners had crossed the platter following nine consecutive hits. Angel Nash was dragged ingloriously from the pitcher's box and another substituted.

Angel was finished and done for. So was Birmingham's colored team. The game ended with a score of eight to one in favor of Knoxville, and the Tennessee team left the field bearing with it much glory and a plentitude of coin.

Angel Nash sought out Miss Zinnia Sanders as she was leaving the grounds. He was armed with a 100% alibi. But Miss Zinnia Sanders would not listen. Words were one thing, facts another. And the facts were that Angel had pitched two games for Birmingham and that Birmingham had lost those two games and the series. Angel knew that it was his cue for a sudden and complete exodus and he exodusted expeditiously.

And that night as Zinnia Sanders sat on her front veranda gazing yearningly in the general direction of Morris Avenue, upon which narrow thoroughfare was housed the firm for which Lucreshus Mabry had worked faithfully for many years, a vision turned in at the gate and Zinnia straightened with an accession of tremulous expectancy.

The vision was Lucreshus Mabry. But what a Lucreshus! He wore a new blue serge coat

and white serge trousers. His shirt was of the purest robin's-egg-blue silk, his flowing necktie a distilled blue of darker hue. His new shoes were white buckskin, his socks sheer white silk. Upon his head a soft white hat perched at a jaunty angle and he carried in his left hand a pair of white kid gloves and in his right a silver-headed snowy cane. Zinnia rose eagerly to greet him. He paused ostentatiously on the top step. There was a smile on his face—a smile of one who is well contented with the progress of his own particular evolution in the general scheme.

“Where Angel Nash is at, Miss Zinnia?”

“I ain’t studyin’ ’bouten no sech wuthless, no ’count, unpitchin’, grinnin’—”

“I gathers, Miss Zinnia, that you disfavors Mistuh Nash at this pretickler momunt?”

She hung her head. “I is well salisfried with my presint comp’ny.”

Lucreshus tapped the porch flooring with the tip of his new white cane. “I on’y jes’ dropped in fo’ a li’l explanatin’,” he said slowly. “jes’ so they woul’n’t be no misunderstandin’. I soht of wan’ed you should understan’ that I uses my haid fo’ sumthin’ mo’ than hangin’ a hat on.

“Fust off, the reason why I took that job down to the Bessemer street fair las’ night was

causen Mistuh Rossler is an ol' friend of mine, 'countin' I worked fo' him yeahs ago. An' I is always been a man to he'p my frien's out."

"Ain't it the truth?" she interrupted encouragingly.

He continued fixedly: "An' when I had done same he went an' give me this heah swell outfit I is got on jes' to show his gratitood. You might also remember that Mistuh Angel Nash is paid fo' mos' of it.

"An' to continue, lemme state that when Angel Nash stahted pitchin' at me I stahted thinkin' at him. An' I thunk thoughts which was wuth money. I knowed he was gwine pitch against Knoxville t'-day an' I egged him on. An', Miss Zinnia, I knowed that ev'y ball that man pitched at me las' night meant one less ball he could pitch in the game t'-day! 'Cause why? 'Cause them nickel baseballs will ruint a pitcher's arm quicker'n anythin' I knows.

"So when he wan'ed to stop I kept him goin'. An' then I tipped Mr. Rossler off an' he bet six hund'ed dollars on Knoxville to win t'-day, which same it done—easy. He give me two hund'ed dollars fo' my share, not countin' lettin' me off on fifty which I owed him. You see"—reflectively—"I soht of figgered Angel Nash's arm would give plumb out in the fo'th innin'.

But he beat my 'ticipations by th'ee singles an' a home run."

Zinnia's eyes were glowing invitingly. "You sho'ly is the thinkines' man, Mistuh Mabry. Ain't you gwine stay an' spen' the evenin' with me?"

Lucreshus shook his head and turned elegantly toward the front gate. He delivered an elaborate bow. "Ise got a 'pawtant 'gagement t'-night with another lady frien', Miss Zinnia. I jes' stopped by to give you a chance to reflec' in the lonesome solisitood of this beautiful evenin', on a few of the hawss laughs you was kin' enough to waff in my direction down to Bessemer las' night when you was in the comp'ny of the mos' easies' mark, the mos' bigges' sucker, the swell-headeded' man which ever 'maged hisse'f a baseball pitcher."

Lucreshus started for the gate. There he turned, hat in hand. "An' b'lieve me, Miss Zinnia," he said impressively, "what I is said is sumthin'!"

And then triumphantly, with his pristine dignity unimpaired, Lucreshus Mabry blended into the darkness.

THE ULTIMA FOOL

THE door opened suddenly and Mr. Roopert Samp entered the same way. He lunged across the poorly furnished room, dislodged the unprotesting Mr. Frenzie Gillings from the only comfortable chair and deposited himself therein. It was very plain that Mr. Samp was peeved. His noble chocolate brow was corrugated with the horizontal lines of worry. His gestures had lost their habitual languor and were sharp and jerky. His speech was snappy as he addressed his too small, too skinny and almost too black companion.

"Frenzie," he said abruptly, "we is up ag'in it."

Frenzie raised meek, docile eyes.

"Is we?"

"We is—an' then some. You is got to do sumthin' bouten it."

"Me?"

"Yeh—you."

"I c'n git me a job o' wuk."

Mr. Samp snorted his disgust. He elevated

his perfectly groomed figure from the depths of the easy-chair and towered above the smaller man.

“Wuk! Who is me you is makin’ talk bouten wuk to? Why you reckon is I got the brains which I is got? Anybody c’n wuk. Brains is to keep you from wukkin’.”

“You cain’t eat brains,” philosophized Frenzie.

“Cain’t eat brains! Heah that man, will you? Who says you cain’t eat brains? Ain’t you been eatin’ my brains fo’ the pas’ six months? Where would you be now if ’twa’n’t fo’ my brains? You ain’t got none yo’ ownse’f, but I is got ’nough f’r two an’ then some. Tha’s all what has been puttin’ sumthin’ betwix yo’ belt buckle an’ yo’ spine many’s the time. Why you po’—”

“But if’n we needs money—”

“We don’ need yo’ kin’ of money. I is got mo’n fifty dollars lef’, an—”

Frenzie’s eyes glowed.

“I is pow’ful hongry fo’ a good square meal, Roopert.”

“What I is got to do with that?” queried the big man forbiddingly. “I ain’t inside of you, is I?”

“No,” sadly, “they ain’t nothin’ a-tall inside of me!”

“You ain’t blamin’ that on me, is you?”

For once in his meek life Frenzie Gillings assumed the negative side of a debate with his friend.

“Yes, I is.”

“How come that foolishment?”

“Fust off you is got money which you ain’t givin’ me none of. Secon’ off you is kep’ me from takin’ th’ee or five good jobs which would of paid me six dollars a week ev’y week.”

“Six dollars a week!” snorted Roopert impatiently. “How c’n two cullud gen’lemen live on six dollars a week?”

“One c’n.”

“One! One! My Lawd! What does you expect’ me to do—wuk?”

“Wuk ain’t never put nobody in jail.”

“An’ ’tain’t gwine keep me out, either. You is the plumbest ongratefules’ man, Frenzie. Me lookin’ after you the way I is been doin’ an’ heah you is talkin’ ’bout th’owin’ me down mo’n what you is done a’ready.”

“You is got fifty dollars,” retorted Frenzie with some show of spirit, “an’ you is even refusin’ to gimme one square meal—a reg’lar steak or sumthin’.”

“You an’ your reg’lar steaks! I is gwine give you meals, Mistuh Gillings, but I is ree-

mahkin' heah an' now that I ain't gwine give you no meals n'r neither no money to buy same s'long's you is got money."

Frenzie glanced up in surprise.

"Me got money?"

"I said it."

"You is talkin' foolishment, Roopert. I ain't got no money."

"You is got jes' the same as."

"Tell which?"

The accusing forefinger of the elegant Mr. Samp went out—and it pointed straight at the four-in-hand which covered some few of the worn spots on Mr. Gillings' sole surviving shirt.

"That they sapphire pin," accused Mr. Samp. "You is said yo'ownse'f that that pin is wuth mo'n a hund'ed dollars."

Instinctively the right hand of Mr. Frenzie Gillings rose and closed protectingly round the tiny diamond with its brilliant sapphire setting. His gesture was almost unconscious—paternally protective. And as the scarfpin disappeared behind the hand of Mr. Gillings, Mr. Gillings' physical appearance changed.

Where, with the pin in full glittering view, Mr. Gillings basked not unprepossessingly in its radiance, he seemed to lose individuality the minute it was hidden. Instead of the wealthy

eccentric who chose raggedy clothes as a mark of distinction he became on the instant a plain, ordinary, undersized ebony person with nothing to mark him out from the masses but a wistful, haunted look which glowed in his eyes whenever Mr. Samp was in the immediate vicinity. His trembling hand clutched the pin tightly, then strayed covertly beneath the once-silken scarf to make sure that the patented safety clasp was still in position. Once reassured, Mr. Gillings breathed with a bit more ease. He gazed defensively at Mr. Samp—in his eyes the same glow which comes to a father defending his young. The sapphire-and-diamond pin was just a little bit more than life itself to Mr. Frenzie Gillings. He stared and cringed and said nothing.

“Yo’ sapphire pin,” he repeated meaningly.

“Wh-wh-wh-what bouten my pin?”

“If’n you is hongry you c’n pawn it.”

Frenzie’s little figure shrank.

“Ain’t gwine do it.”

“Then you c’n sta’ve fo’ all I care. That pin is wuth mo’n a hund’ed dollars an’ it ain’t on’y cos’ you two bits.”

“It’s my lucky pin, Roopert. You know well as me I is done won it to a raffle.”

“You an’ yo’ pin!” snorted Mr. Samp.

“Cain’t you be reasonable bouten it? I ain’t astin’ you to sell it, is I?”

“Pawnin’ is same as sellin’ if’n you cain’t git money to git it out ag’in.”

“Who says we ain’t got it?”

“Who says we is?”

Roopert Samp glared disgustedly at his friend. Mr. Samp wanted money and he wanted plenty of it. More, he wanted it without work. Not that he was opposed to labor, but he preferred to see the other fellow doing it. He extracted from his pocket a brilliantly nickeled cigarette case and lighted a cheap Turkish cigarette. Then he turned toward the door.

“Frenzie Gillings,” he said slowly, “I an’ you is done finished with one ’nother.”

“Roopert,” wailed Frenzie in sudden terror, “you ain’t gwine zert me, is you?”

“I is doin’ that ve’y same thing.”

“But, Roopert—”

“They ain’t no use in my knockin’ roun’ with no man which is so onreasomble like what you is. Tha’s all they is to it.”

“But I ain’t onreasomble.”

“You is.”

“Ain’t.”

“You is, I says. An’ when I says it it’s so.”

“I ain’t onreasomble—an’ I c’n prove it. I’ll do anythin’ you asts. Anythin’, Roopert,

'ceptin' on'y pawn my stick pin. If'n I was to depaht company with this heah stick pin, Roopert, they wouldn't be nothin' lef' of me a-tall. Would they now?"

Roopert studied his innocuous companion closely.

"No-o, they mos' likely woul'n't."

"An' you ain't got no call goin' off an zertin' me thisaway, Roopert. What is I gwine do 'thout you?"

"What is you gwine do with me? Tha's what I is askin'."

"I'll do anythin' you says. Anythin'—don't keer what 'tis neither!"

"Huh! You is on'y makin' talk with yo' mouth."

"Try me!" pleaded Frenzie eagerly. "Jes' try me, tha's all what I asts! Try me jes' wunst!"

"Hm!" Mr. Samp seated himself and eyed his friend closely. "If'n you on'y had a li'l' brains, Frenzie, yo'd be a'mos' a'right. Now lemme see, I is got fifty dollars an' you ain't got nothin' 'ceptin' a pin you says you is gwine keep. We needs some money—a whole heap of money. Question is, how we is gwine git it?"

"Yeh—ain't you talkin' now?"

Roopert checked off the items on his well-

manicured fingers. "We is pawnd ev'ything we owns which is hockable."

"Ev'ything which I owns, you mean," reproved Frenzie.

"I's all one an' the same. We both eats offen the money, seein' as we is partners. All we is got lef' in the world is a busted trunk, two soots of clothes which I cain't do without an' continue to be a gen'leman, an'—an'—"

"You might sell that ol' autymobile which you is got," suggested Frenzie.

Roopert favored him with a glance of withering scorn.

"Ev'y time you opens yo' mouth, Frenzie Gillings, nothin' comes out."

"The car runs," persisted Frenzie doggedly.

"Sometimes."

"An' they is lots of folks with on'y jes' a li'l' money which would buy any autymobile which runs a-tall."

"Not my autymobile."

"Folks which ain't got cars is crazy for 'em."

"If'n somebody bought mine he'd be crazy at 'em."

"Jes' the same," postulated Frenzie, "I is got a hunch they is money to be made f'om that car."

"Huh! You is foolish as you looks an' they

ain't nothin' mo' foolisher than that. Them pair of dice I won that car with I done th'owed 'em away long ago. That autymobile ain't been nothin' on'y a li'bility."

"Hm! Li'bility!" Frenzie chuckled softly. "There you is with li'bility 'surance on a autymobile which won't travel 'cept once in a while."

"Nee'n't rub it in, need you? Flo'ian Slap-
pey sol' me that li'bility 'surance an' sence I had it—mos' a year now—that car ain't run far 'nough to bust a muskeeter." He crossed to a battered trunk and lifted the lid. From its depths he extracted a thumbed policy. "Huh! Happy Days Autymobile Li'bility 'Surance—five hund'ed dollars fo' one accident—thousan' dollars fo' two accidents. If'n I could run over my ownse'f fo' five hund'ed dollars I could junk that car at a profit."

"Yeh," agreed Frenzie, "couldn't you jes'?"

"I a'mos' wisht I could run over somebody," said Roopert bitterly. "I got stang for sevum-teen dollars with this heah policy."

"What good it'd do you to run over somebody?"

"No good—less'n—"

Suddenly the eyes of Mr. Roopert Samp narrowed and a speculative light played in them. They turned full on Mr. Frenzie Gillings and

rested there appraisingly. "This heah policy," he communed, "says if'n I runs over on'y jes' one man he gits five hund'ed dollars—cash."

"Ain't you talkin' now?"

"I is that same."

Roopert paused to light another cigarette, his eyes never leaving the face of his friend. Finally Frenzie became conscious of the scrutiny and he fidgeted.

"I 'clare to goodness gracious, Roopert, you is actin' like you ain't never saw me befo'."

"I ain't"—with a peculiar nuance.

"Ain't which?"

"Saw you befo'—this-a-way."

"Which way?"

"Lookin' like money—an' lots of it."

"Me?" Then Frenzie's hand flew protectingly again to his scarfpin. "You lemme 'lone bouten this heah sapphire."

"I ain't studyin' bouten yo' ol' pin. I is speckilatin' 'bout you."

"What 'bout me?"

"If'n," remarked Roopert deliberately, "my car was t' git chuned up so's it'd run a half block an' if'n in that half block it was t' run over somebody, that there somebody would git five hund'ed dollars under this heah policy which I is got."

"Somebody else gettin' five hund'ed dollars,"

remarked Frenzie sententiously, "ain't gettin' me no eatments."

"Yeh 'tis too."

"Huh?"

"Providin' you is the man which is runned over."

"Providin' I is—" Then the eyes of Mr. Frenzie Gillings popped wide with horror. "My Lawd! Roopert, is you plannin' to run over me?"

"Five hund'ed dollars is a lot of money an' you is mighty li'l' much of a man."

"B-b-b-but—"

"An' I'd on'y run over you easy-like."

"Nossuh!" Frenzie was on his feet in a rage of protest.

"I ain't gwine do it. I'll wuk fo' you an' I'll do anythin' which you asts me. But I ain't gwine be a co'pse fo' no man."

Roopert made a hopeless gesture.

"There you goes ag'in! Fust off you refuses to pawn yo' pin so's we c'n eat dinner. Then secon' off you refuses to lemme run over you an' split the li'bility fifty-fifty with me—or sevumty-five twenty-five. I ain't gwine kill you, is I?"

"You ain't said you ain't."

"An' I ain't said I is."

"Well, is you is or is you ain't?"

"I ain't. 'Sides my autymobile ain't got power 'nough to kill no man. Hittin' you would stall the motor shuah. Then I could carry you to the horspital, go to see Lawyer Chew, which represents the Happy Days 'Surance Company, tell him that it was my fault an' make the comp'ny settle spot cash fo' five hund'ed dollars. You woul'n't be hu't an' yo'd have—"

"Five hund'ed dollars," mused Frenzie enviously.

"Says which?"

"Two hund'ed an' fifty apiece."

"You talks crazy, cullud man. Who paid fo' this heah policy? Who won the autymobile? With me furnishin' all th' materials you is ast-in' me to split even?"

"Ise the man what gits runned over," suggested Frenzie. "Seems like I'd oughter have half the profits."

"Seems like ain't is. I'll give you one hund'ed an' fifty dollars soon's we c'n cillec'."

"Two hund'ed."

"Hund'ed an' fifty."

"Hund'ed an' sevumty-five. Hones', Roopert, they ain't no profit in it f'r me at less'n that."

"Hm!" Roopert's hand came out and clasped the skinny claw of his friend. "Done with you! Jes' to show you I is a gen'rous man I's gwine

give you hund'ed an' sevumty-five dollars cash money."

"An' you ain't gwine hu't me?"

"Co'se not—not much anyways."

"Not none whatever, Roopert?"

"On'y jes' 'nough to cillec' the 'surance."

"Huh! S'posin' you was the one what gits runned over."

"Tha's th' easies' paht," snapped Roopert, "an' I'd do it in a minute, on'y the policy says I is got to do the runnin' over. Hones', Frenzie, you ain't gwine know nothin' hit you."

"No-o-o"—slowly—"on'y I is hopin' mebbe I is."

"Trouble with you," snapped Roopert impatiently, "is that you is a nachel bohn pestimist. 'Stid of lookin' at the hund'ed an' sevumty-five dollars you is gwine git you is thinkin' 'bout how much it'll hu't. That don't make sense."

"Twa'n't my siggestion, were it?"

"Co'se not. You ain't got 'nough sense to make no siggestion liken to that. B'lieve me, Frenzie, you is sho' lucky to have a frien' with the brains like which I is got. When is you ever saw 'nother man who not on'y knowed in advance he was gwine have a accident but also knowed how much money he was gwine git f'r it?"

“Hm! Where’s you ever know a man who knowed a accident was gwine happen to him that di’n’t be somewheres else when it happened?”

“You is talkin’ nutty talk. Le’s us discourse the details. We needs the money an’ you is hongry.”

The logic was unassailable. Frenzie was hungry—terribly so. He expressed his longing.

“If’n I c’d on’y have one good steak trimmed with onions—”

“Huh! What a man wants with a steak when he’s gwine be a accident pretty soon? It’s jes’ like you—no brains a-tall—talkin’ ’bout wastin’ good eatments that-a-way.”

But Frenzie held out determinedly for his steak and eventually won. Roopert escorted him to a restaurant and grudgingly paid for a succulent tenderloin which Frenzie inhaled luxuriously. From time to time he turned upon his beneficent friend a mildly inquiring stare in which there was a faint glow of a suspicion which would not entirely still.

“You is sho’ you ain’t gittin’ me into sumthin’, Roopert?”

“Huh, tha’s my lookout!”

“Yeh, but it’s my accident.”

“You ain’t got nothin whichsoever to do with

it, Frenzie Gillings. All what you is got to do is to see me come down the street an' when I comes to where you is at you steps down from the curb an' I steers into you. The res'll all come easy."

"All you does is jes' ride?"

"Also I stahts the car. Tha's more wuk than what you does."

Frenzie was spellbound by Roopert's argument and after all was said and done a hundred and seventy-five dollars was a hundred and seventy-five dollars, particularly as it was to come to him in cash. Roopert was a good friend—Frenzie was quite sure of that. Who but a good friend could concoct a scheme by which that much money could be turned over so easily? Who but a good friend would agree to collide with him gently—jes' on'y five hund'ed dollars' wuth? Who but a friend would agree to start the destructive car by himself—not even asking the prospective victim to help?

Frenzie sighed.

"I sho' is glad that I is palled up with you, Roopert."

Roopert smiled beatifically.

"Now you is talkin' sensible talk."

Frenzie's meal completed, they rose and Roopert reluctantly paid the check. They emerged into the street and made their way to the dilapi-

dated garage which reposed in the rear of an equally dilapidated house. Roopert pensively surveyed the remains of what had once been a runable car.

"Ol' autymobile," he soliloquized, "I is always done said they was sumthin' wo'th while in you' innards. Heah is where they comes out."

"Which," inquired Frenzie—"the innards?"

"Uh-huh."

"Mine?"

"No!" exploded Roopert Samp impatiently. "You is always askin' foolish questions with yo' mouth. If'n you don' shut up might' quick I is gwine call th' whole deal off."

They backed the car into the driveway by hand and faced it streetward the same way.

"Now," explained Roopert, "all you is got to do is to walk down Eighteenth Street an' stand in front of the Champeen Theater. When you heahs me comin' you watch out an' staht across the street. I is gwine preten' that I is rattled an' I is gwine slam into you."

"Into me?"

"Yeh."

"Slam?"

"Say, lis'en heah, you li'l' piece of nothin' atall, how many times is I tellin' you that I is bossin' this heah job? Answer me that."

“I ain’t meant no hahm.”

“Then keep yo’ fool mouth shut when I is speckilatin’. Now I asts you—is you ready?”

“I reckon so.”

“Ain’t you know?”

“Reckon so.”

“Then walk on down to th’ Champeen an’ wait.” He glanced toward the car. “I ain’t gwine keep you waitin’ no mo’ longer’n I c’n he’p.”

“Well—”

Frenzie started up the street. Roopert stopped him, hand outstretched.

“G’-by, Frenzie.”

The eyes of the little negro seemed about to pop from his ebony face.

“Wh-wha’s that?”

“G’-by.”

Frenzie slipped a fishy paw into the large palm of his thoughtful friend.

“Wh-what you mean—g’-by?”

Roopert saw that he had made a false move.

“Nothin’—on’y jes’ a matter of fohm.”

Frenzie sighed relievedly.

“Oh, tha’s diffe’nt. G’-by.”

They shook hands. Once again Frenzie turned away and once more Roopert stopped him.

“Frenzie!”

“Huh?”

“That pin o’ your’n—”

“What ’bout this pin?”

“S’posin’ it should git accidented too? I was soht of thinkin’ mebbe if I was wearin’ it ontill after you gotten out o’ the horspital—”

“Nossuh! I an’ you thinks diffe’nt chunes. This heah pin is mine an’ I wears it. I is willin’ to git run over by you, but I ain’t willin’ you should wear my pin.”

“But s’posin’—”

“I ain’t s’posin’ no s’poses ’bouten this heah pin, so g’-by, Mistuh Samp.”

Frenzie departed feeling that at least he had saved his pin irrespective of what the immediate future might hold for himself. But long before he reached the spot of his tryst with the temperamental automobile he found himself somewhat less enthused than he had been while basking in the glare of Roopert Samp’s hypnotic personality. Not that definite thought of mutiny entered his mind. He had been too many months under the polished thumb of Roopert not to understand the hopelessness of opposing that gentleman’s fertile brain and iron will. But somehow he became convinced of the fact that all was not as it should be regarding the little undertaking upon which he had now definitely embarked.

It wasn't that he had any compunctions regarding the conspiracy against the Happy Days Liability Insurance Company. Not at all. They had sold the policy to Roopert and had taken Roopert's good money therefor and the policy distinctly said that for a single accident they would indemnify Roopert to the extent of five hundred dollars. There it was, plain black on white, so that all might read who could. And certainly, he reflected, since the company stood ready to pay five hundred dollars for an accident it was none of their business that a percentage of the proceeds should go to Roopert's closest friend and the remaining majority percentage to Roopert himself. Yassuh, Roopert sho' was a man with a haid an' he used it fo' sumthin' mo' than a hatrack.

But despite his passionate belief in his friend, Frenzie was considerably ill at ease. A hospital in immediate prospect was not pleasing. He envisioned the long line of beds in the colored ward of the hospital, and he tried desperately hard to forget it. He failed—failed miserably. And miserably he perched before the Champion Theater, glazing eyes turned sightlessly on the seething traffic of the broad and busy thoroughfare. Even the jazzy music which spurted from the orchestrion of the Champion Theater failed to hearten him or twitch one single toe of his dance-loving feet.

How long he waited he never knew. On one hand it seemed an eternity; on the other but an instant when the clatter and clangor of the traffic was split wide by the roaring of a three-and-a-half cylinder motor. There was no mistaking the sound. No other automobile could have made that racket and continued to live. And with the coughing roar Frenzie's last hope slithered off into oblivion. There had been the possibility—even the probability—that Roopert would be unable to get the car started. But now—Frenzie turned harried eyes down the street. There was the car—a grimy, reddish beast which swayed drunkenly from side to side. In the driver's seat was the immaculate Roopert bowing and smiling to his acquaintances along the sidewalks; Roopert happy and contented in the knowledge that he was about to capitalize his friendship and his insurance policy to the extent of three hundred and twenty-five dollars.

Frenzie couldn't quite forgive Roopert's bland smile. It seemed so—so heartless. One would almost fancy that Roopert was enjoying himself. Frenzie clenched his fists and set his small, pointed jaw. Not him—he wa'n't gwine t' be runned over by no man—nussuh, 'deedy. That was askin' ontirely too much fum a frien'.

Rattlety-bang-bing! The crazy car had nego-

tiated the Fourth Avenue crossing with more or less safety and was headed toward Third—and Frenzie. That gentleman's eyes were closed and his lips were moving spasmodically.

“Oh, lawsy, ifn' he'll on'y jes' hit me easy—easy! I ain't gwine do it! Ain't gwine—hundreded an' sevumty-five dollars.”

Closer and closer came the car. And finally Frenzie stepped from the curb. He didn't take the plunge of his own volition; it seemed as though his feet moved him. Certainly the bit of brain that was Frenzie's had no part in the mechanical operation.

In the driver's seat of the car Roopert smiled happily. Up to this very moment he had been more than a trifle inclined to the belief that Frenzie might renege. But now that he had his man well off the sidewalk he knew that success was his. Not a chance for Frenzie now!

Suddenly Frenzie saw the onrushing car and darted back. Someone on the sidewalk screamed. Roopert, all too eager to carry through the little plan, slued the car violently to the right. Frenzie yowled in genuine terror. A warning howl went up from two young bucks who lounged against a lamp-post. And then came a weird scrunch. The scrunchee was Frenzie. His last thought as he went down was one of pained surprise in the knowledge that

Roopert had struck him not wisely but too well.

It seemed but a moment later that Frenzie's eyes flickered open on a room hopelessly clean and sternly deodorized. He tried to turn over on his side and a huge ax descended upon his midriff and smote him a mighty smite. He groaned—groaned loudly and fervently, and immediately a vision appeared—a vision all in white and with the prettiest brown face Frenzie had ever seen, set off bewitchingly beneath a nurse's cap. Frenzie closed his eyes, quite certain that now he had arrived at his reward. But the racking pain of his earthly body informed him cheerlessly that he was still of the living. The eyes opened again—and still the vision was there. Frenzie's lips formed a natural query:

“What yo' name is?”

The nurse smiled.

“Vangeline Hood,” she answered softly.

“Golly, tha's a pretty name! What you is?”

“I is yo' nu'se. You mus'n't talk now.”

“C'n I look?”

A rich lavender blush suffused the brown cheeks of the nurse.

“Ain't no law says you cain't.”

Frenzie looked. And he overlooked no detail of Vangeline Hood's pulchritudinous perfections. She was well worth the admiration he

was so generously bestowing upon her—young, curvy, dimpled, adorably kissy.

“Wigglin’ tripe,” he murmured, “things ain’t so wuss after all!”

Miss Hood said nothing. She continued to say it. She sat by the bedside of the injured man and watched expertly. Frenzie sighed and relaxed. And finally he allowed his gaze to roam to himself. Something was wrong. Every here and there about his spare frame was a bandage. He reeked of antiseptics. Every bone and muscle in his body ached howlingly. He moved one foot, then the other; then his hands, his fingers and head.

“They ain’t any bones broke,” reassured Vangeline kindly.

Frenzie favored her with a look of gratitude.

“Not none?”

“Not one—tha’s what the doctor says, anyhow. That autymobile must’ve hit you pow’ful hahd.”

“B’lieve me it did—an’ I knows!”

“It’s a wonder you wa’n’t kilt.”

Frenzie smiled pridefully.

“Roopert is a elegant driver,” he complimented.

Suddenly an idea came to Frenzie. It came all in a bunch and not in little bits, as his ideas

were usually born. His eyes opened wide with horror.

“I is ondressed!” he declared positively.

Vangeline smiled.

“Sho’ly you is.”

“I ain’t got my clothes.”

“Co’sse not.”

“Where they is at?”

“They’ve been checked with the sup’rintendent.”

“Lis’en heah—” For a few seconds Frenzie forgot his pain. He leaned forward intently and possessed himself of Miss Hood’s hand. “You go down to that they sup’rintendent an’ tell her I says when I comes in heah they was a sca’f pin in my necktie. Tell her I wants it.”

“It’s puffedly safe where it is at, Mistah Gillings.”

“That pin ain’t safe nowheres ’ceptin’ where I is, Miss Hood, an’ tha’s where I wants it.”

“But—”

“Don’ but me no buts. I wan’s my pin.”

Vangeline shook her head and rose to do the bidding of her battered patient. Within ten minutes she was back, and glittering brilliantly against the rich chocolate cream of her hand was the sapphire-and-diamond stick pin. She extended it reluctantly toward Frenzie and watched him as he inserted it in the upper sec-

tion of his pajamas with meticulous care, holding it fast with the patent safety device.

"Tha's a pow'ful pretty pin, Mistuh Gillings," she commented, with a new respect for the man in her voice.

"Pretty is right. It's the prettiest pin they ever was."

"I reckon it is."

"I knows it. That pin is wuth mo'n a hundred dollars cash money."

"It's plumb elegant—'bout the elegantes' pin I is ever seen," she breathed enviously.

"It's cumsider'ble pin," he said proudly. "An' now, Miss Hood—"

In the doorway at the far end of the otherwise vacant ward there loomed a figure. Frenzie's eyes beamed a welcome. Miss Hood rose and approached Roopert Samp in the doorway. That gentleman scintillated in sartorial contrast to the poor figure of the man on the bed. But Roopert had no eyes for the pretty nurse. Rather there was in his manner a preoccupation and worry that was unusual. He questioned her and she designated the helpless Frenzie. Then she made her exit. Roopert, his eyes everywhere save on the pain-filled face of Frenzie, shambled to the bed and seated himself on the chair just made vacant by the nurse.

"Evenin', Frenzie."

“Evenin’?”

“Yehh, it’s evenin’. Mawnin’ done been gone.”

“Golly!” Then the eyes filled with inquiry. “You sho’ landed that they autymobile up ag’in me hahd, Roopert.”

“Hahd? Huh, that wa’n’t half’s hahd as I could of hit you!”

“No-o, mebbe not. An’ I ain’t half as daid as I might be.”

“You ain’t suff’rin’—”

“Lots you know bouten suff’rin’!” Frenzie gazed speculatively at his friend and then summoned a game smile. “Well, tha’s all over. They ain’t nothin’ to do now on’y collec’ the li’bility ’surance. Ain’t it so?”

“Yeh—ain’t it?”

“Is you saw Lawyer Chew which repr’sents the ’surance company?”

“Yeh, I is saw him.”

“When he is comin’ to see me?”

“He ain’t comin’.”

Frenzie smiled.

“He paid that they claim to you?”

“No ’surance comp’nies pays they claims to the man what they ain’t jue to.”

“Then he mus’ be comin’ to see me.”

“No-o”—evasively—“not prezac’ly.”

“What you means—not prezac’ly?”

"I means," snapped Roopert desperately, still without meeting Frenzie's eyes, "that he ain't comin' to see you a-tall."

"Not comin—what kind of words is them which you is makin' with yo' mouth, Roopert Samp?"

"Cain't you on'erstan' plain English?"

"But English which says why you is tellin' me Lawyer Chew ain't comin'?"

"Because"—Roopert paused, cleared his throat, gazed raptly through a window and coughed. "I went to see him—"

"You done tol' me that once a'ready."

"An' I tol' him it was all my fault an' please to pay you the five hund'ed dollars which was jue under the policy."

"Oh, lawsy, an' he 'lowed it wa'n't no good of a claim?"

"No, he said it was a good 'nough claim all right. But they is a soht of hitch in payin' it."

"Which soht of hitch?"

"We-e-ell, it's this-a-way," explained Roopert slowly: "He soht of thought it was funny I didn't know bouten it an' he 'splained to me that he couldn't reccomend payin' no sech of a claim 'cause they wa'n't nobody to pay it. You see, Frenzie, it's soht of hahd luck to tell you, but the Happy Days Li'bility 'Surance Company went an' busted 'bout five months ago."

More than three horrified minutes were necessary for Frenzie to comprehend the extent of the catastrophe. And finally when it did seep into his brain that the accident was not to be indemnified because of the fact that the insurance company had been thoughtless enough to go to the financial wall several months previously he opened his lips for what was intended to be a tirade of vituperation. But Roopert saw it coming and forestalled it. He extended a sorrowfully restraining hand.

“Seems to me, Frenzie,” he said slowly, “that you would of had sense enough to find out’ if’n the company was still livin’ befo’ you got yo’s’e’f runned over.”

Frenzie gazed speechlessly at his company.

“That I would of thunk—”

“Yeh—you. What you ain’t got, Frenzie, is no brains.”

“B-b-but you said—”

“ ‘I said’ ain’t got nothin’ to do with it, an’ it ain’t payin’ you no money. There you is done give me all th’ trouble of stahtin’ that car of mine when they wa’n’t no money in it fo’ me an’ you never even sayin’ you is sorry. Hones’, Frenzie, you is a po’ soht of frien’ to have. Now I is got a siggestion to make.”

“I is tried ’nough of yo’ siggestions, Roopert. I is off of ’em fo’ eve’ mo’—amen.”

“Is you ever cumsid’ed how you is gwine eat when you gits yo’s’e’f outen this horspital?”

“You is got money,” hopefully.

“The money which I is got is mine. Now I wants to sigges’ that you gimme yo’ scahfpin to hock so’s you c’n have money when you gits—”

“You lemme ’lone bouten my scahfpin, Roopert Samp. Tha’s the on’y thing you don’t never think ’bout nothin’ else but. An’ you cain’t have it.”

Roopert rose. His manner was that of a man infinitely depressed by the stubbornness of one who refused to be done as he would be done by.

“Well, I reckon I better be trottin’ ’long. I needs a good square meal an’ I knows where they is some good juicy po’k chops waitin’ to be et.”

Long after Roopert had departed Frenzie lay staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. His cosmic scheme had gone flooie and Roopert had spell-bound him to the point where he almost fancied that the oversight was blamable upon him. At that he had done his painful best. He turned on his side and slept. When he woke he lay very still, thrilling deliciously. A warm hand clasped his. He raised his eyes to the face of Miss Vangeline Hood. But her gaze did not meet his. She was staring intently at the sapphire pin

which gleamed from his pajamas. And suddenly she sighed.

"Miss Vangeline?"

She started.

"Huh?"

"I c'n call you Miss Vangeline, cain't I?"

"Co'se you can, Mistuh Gillings. What you wishes?"

"You is a pow'ful pretty gal, Miss Vangeline."

"Well," she lied boldly, "you ain't so wuss lookin' yo' ownse'f."

"You is bouten the prettiest gal I is ever seen."

"You go on, Mistuh Gillings. I reckon you is some loose flatt'rer."

"I ain't never fell in love with no other woman befo'."

"Oh, Mistuh Gillings!"

He gulped.

"I means it."

For a fearsome moment he stared at her, expecting that she would do as other beautiful women had done in the past and receive his declaration of passion as an insult. But she did nothing of the kind. Instead her fingers inclosed his more firmly and she veiled her eyes with maidenly propriety.

Save for the couple, the colored ward was empty. Also it was silent—so silent that Frenzie fancied he could hear the beating of his heart, a trip-hammer thumping which hurt his bruised ribs. The idea was coming to him that for once in his life he had met a worth-while woman to whom he was not physically unattractive, and he found a shivery thrill in the thought. It never occurred to him that his pin had anything to do with the promised capitulation of Miss Vangeline Hood.

“You is gwine nuss me, Miss Vangeline?”

“Fo’ a while.”

“A while?”

“Uh-huh. You ain’t so badly hu’t.”

“I ain’t hu’t a-tall, cause’n I is glad I is hu’t as much as I is, countin’ it brung me heah to meet you.”

“W-e-ell, th’ee days f’om now I is leavin’ the ward.”

“An’ you ain’t gwine nuss me no mo’ afteh that?”

“Nossuh, Mistuh Gillings. Not that I woul’n’t if’n I cou’d, but they is movin’ me into the diet kitchen.”

Frenzie inbreathed deeply.

“I reck’n some folks c’n become mighty good frien’s in th’ee days, cain’t they, Miss Vangeline?”

“Yassuh, Mistuh Gillings, I reck’n they might.”

And what is more to the point—they did. The colored ward remained mercifully empty and Frenzie Gillings forgot his pain under the expert professional ministrations of Miss Vangeline Hood. There was something so—so dog-gone nice bouten Miss Vangeline. She soht of made things easier.

It was on the second day of the ardent, progressive and violent courtship that Roopert Samp paid another visit to the hospital. This time he did not mention the pin, nor did he mention anything else. Frenzie did all the talking. Roopert listened impatiently to the panegyrics of Miss Vangeline Hood. Frenzie described her manifold perfections in terms of the superlative, fairly wiggling with an access of his affection for her. Roopert sneered.

“Hones’, Frenzie, Ise bettin’ you is in love.”

“This heah is one time you wins, Roopert. You sho’ does. Me an’ love has shook han’s an’ became frien’s.”

“Huh! If’n I ever had any doubt bouten yo’ bein’ a plumb fool I ain’t got it no mo’. Fallin’ in love with a train’ nuss! Ain’t you got sense enough to know that they ain’t no woman would love you?”

“This gal is diff’ent,” explained Frenzie slowly. “She thinks—”

“I know jes’ what she thinks. She thinks you is sick an’ she is sorry fo’ you—tha’s all what she is.”

“You ain’t saw her, Roopert. You ain’t saw her ontill yet—” he raised his eyes. “There she is yonder comin’ in the do’. Ain’t she pretty as—pretty as—a g’ranium?”

Roopert looked. And even though he had spoken to Vangeline two days before, he was seeing her now for the first time. At the occasion of their first meeting the little matter of the insolvency of the Happy Days Liability Insurance Company had been sitting rather heavily on his chest. Now he was at mental liberty to catalogue her good points and he found them many and worthy the highest praise. Roopert was considerable of a connoisseur of women. He was a mahogany Beau Brummell about whom women buzzed hopefully, and experienced as he was with them he saw in the beauty of Miss Vangeline Hood a rich promise which was as exquisite as it was rare. He acknowledged the introduction with a Delsartean bow and cast forth the full flower of his hypnotic smile. Miss Hood had only a few moments to spare on the friend of her patient and she walked on through the ward. Roopert stared after her and smiled.

The voice of Frenzie punctured the silence hopefully:

“Ain’t she sumthin’ pretty elegant?”

Roopert turned.

“Good-lookin’ gal, Frenzie.”

“Good-lookin’ is ugly compared by what she is. If’n I was on’y ma’ied to a gal lik’n to her, Roopert—”

“Ma’ied? You an’ her? Huh, not a chance! A gal pretty as what she is woul’n’t th’ow herse’f away on a no-’count undersized, shriv’led-up, bone-busted nothin’ liken to what you is.”

The following afternoon Roopert again visited his suffering friend. And no sooner had he gazed at Frenzie’s face that he knew that something of moment had occurred. Frenzie’s lips were expanded in a smile of ineffable bliss and there was something else about Frenzie that was not normal. The splotch of rich blue had disappeared from his pajama jacket. Roopert leaned forward.

“Where ’tis, Frenzie?”

“Where what is?”

“Yo’ pin?”

“It’s my pin, ain’t it?” queried Frenzie defensively.

“Where it’s at?”

“Reck’n tha’s my business.”

“I asts you—”

“Well,” savagely, “I give it to her—tha’s what I done.”

“You—you give yo’ sapphire pin away?”

“Yeh, reck’n ’twas mine.”

“Who—who you give that pin to, Frenzie Gillings?”

Frenzie’s eyes roamed helplessly about the ward, then fastened belligerently on the accusing eyes of Roopert Samp.

“I done give it to Miss Vangeline Hood, tha’s who I give it to!”

For a few seconds Roopert was horrifiedly silent. Then he burst forth into a tirade against vampires in general and Miss Vangeline Hood in particular.

“Why you give it to her?”

“Well-l”—it was a distinctly personal and embarrassing question—“I—I soht of love that gal a heap.”

“You is engage’?”

“Not ’zac’ly. But she is soht of promise’ to git engage’ to me after I gits well an’ fin’s me a job.”

“An’ then,” snapped Roopert, “I s’pose I’ll have to go live with you.”

“No-o,” slowly, “I ain’t hahdly reck’n tha’s a good idea, Roopert. I ain’t hahdly reck’n it is.”

Roopert said nothing. Still saying it, he

huffed from the ward and banged the door behind him. Frenzie favored this departure with a regretful sigh and then sank slumbrously into a glorious daydream anent marital bliss, with Vangeline Hood as the party of the second part.

Somehow the process of giving the pin to Miss Hood had seemed perfectly natural. It was all in the family.

The following morning Vangeline did not appear in the colored ward. An angular and dark female of forbidding mien took her place. With the interest of the hospital thus dissipated, Frenzie found his enthusiasm in the medicated surroundings lagging. The pain of his bruised bones and muscles was lessening and he questioned the house physician as to how soon he could be discharged. The answer he received pleased him. He was quite sure that he would see Vangeline occasionally during the five days that he was destined to remain as a patient. Also, he was certain that Roopert would continue to visit him frequently and relieve the tedium of the dragging hours.

But he saw neither Vangeline nor Roopert. He didn't quite understand it. Of course Roopert was probably busy concocting a scheme for their mutual betterment, but it struck Frenzie that Vangeline might have dropped in at odd moments to let him gaze at the sapphire pin

which was once his. But nothing of the sort happened—not for five days. And on the fifth Frenzie was discharged as cured. He limped considerably and he felt a bit weak and wabby. He started for the room which he shared with Roopert, planning to borrow one of that gentleman's neckties and return to the hospital for a rapturous evening with Vangeline. He knew that she would have a valid excuse for her long-continued absence from the ward after procuring the sapphire pin from him and he was eager to resume the courtship where it had been so abruptly terminated on the occasion of her final day as his nurse.

Frenzie was trustfully in the seventh heaven of a lover's delight. The castles which he so readily constructed were very large and very much in the air. The future was a thing bright and roseate and in no way marred by thorns. Vangeline—Vangeline Gillings!

He reached the unpainted two-story house where he roomed with Mr. Roopert Samp and turned in at the gate. He laboriously and painfully mounted the rickety stairway and entered the room. And then he smiled—he knew that he was at home. It was all as he had left it—the fine double bed which was Roopert's and the rusty, iron cot upon which he laid o' nights; the torn straw suitcase which was his and the real

leather one which belonged to Roopert. And in a far corner, limned in a haze of fragrant cigar smoke, the finely knit figure of the immaculate Roopert seated in the one easy-chair, feet on window sill, eyes staring languidly toward the sky line of the city of Birmingham.

Frenzie experienced a qualm of regret at forsaking this bachelor luxury for the uncertainties of the connubial state, but—well, he was very fond of his romance. It was his first and only one and he cherished it with a passionate cherish. He cleared his throat. "'Lo, Roopert."

Roopert showed undue excitement at the unexpected entrance of his friend. He leaped to his feet and whirled.

"What you means, Useless, by comin' rushin' in on me like that?"

"I ain't rush in on you, Roopert, 'deedy I ain't."

"You did so!"

"Well, mebbe—"

Suddenly Frenzie ceased to speak. He ceased completely and profoundly. His eyes opened slowly and his jaw sagged. He quivered. And he stared—stared in petrified horror straight at Roopert—straight at that silk-covered portion of his friend's anatomy midway between collar button and waistline. He raised skinny,

trembling fingers to a perspiring brow and passed them weakly across eyes which saw without the power of transmitting comprehension to the brain.

The thing was utterly inconceivable. And yet—Frenzie shook his head, gasped, gurgled and came finally and reluctantly to a realization of the fact that his eyes were not playing him false. For there it was, flashing gloriously in the center of Roopert's newest and best scarf, evidence damningly evident.

"Roopert!" he wailed.

Roopert instinctively raised his right hand and touched the sapphire pin which reposed with scintillant elegance where all who would might see. And Roopert ducked. He did not seem overly pleased at the unannounced reappearance of his runty little friend. In fact, he registered an intense displeasure and a not inconsiderable amount of embarrassment. His eyes roved restlessly about the room and finally:

"Wh-what you is sayin', cullud man?"

"That pin!"

"What 'bouten this heah pin?"

"It—it's mine!"

Roopert drew a deep breath and then the habit of years returned.

"You is a liar!"

His voice assumed its old aggressiveness.

“Now, Roopert—”

“This heah pin is my own.”

“B-b-but it looks like the one I done had.”

“Looks like is is. You might’s well know now, Mistuh Frenzie Gillings, that this heah is the ve’y same scahfpin which you useter had.”

Frenzie was bewildered. His pin, his cherished pin—the glittering bauble which had for so long held Frenzie’s bullety head proudly above the masses—his pin in Roopert’s necktie—possessive words on Roopert’s lips. He didn’t understand, he couldn’t understand, but he did know that a feeling of tense resentment was slowly and surely suffocating him.

“Where you git that pin at, Roopert?”

“Where you reck’n?” belligerently.

“I ain’t reck’nin’. I is astin’.”

“Well, I done gotten it off yo’ gal.”

“My—my—you means Miss Vangeline Hood?”

“Tha’s the name she gimme.”

“But Roopert—”

With Frenzie cringing in inquiring grief and fear, Roopert again rose to heights of mastery. He strode across the room and towered over the figure of his friend.

“Now you lis’en heah at what I is sayin’, Frenzie Gillings. I is allers tol’ you that you

is a wuthless, no'count little runt which needs a feller like'n to what I is to look after you. An' this heah succumstance proves it, 'cause when you stahted ravin' at me 'bouten this heah Vangeline Hood I knowed sumthin' was wrong—plumb wrong. 'Cause I says to myse'f then, Frenzie, what I says now right to yo' own ugly face, that they ain't nary woman which could fall in love with a nothin' atall like'n to what you is. So I says to myse'f right off quick like that, that sence she di'n't want you she must of been after sumthin' which you had, an' the on'y thing 'bouten you which was wuth mo'n a lead two-bit piece was yo' stick pin. Sho' nuff I come to the horspital that day an' foun' out you had given it to her. An' bein' a friend of your'n, they wa'n't but one thing to do an' that was to git it back. Ain't that a fac'?"

He paused interrogatively. Frenzie's head wobbled uncertainly.

"Y-y-you sho' is the talkines' man Roo-pert."

"Anyway I decided they wa'n't nothin' fo' me to do on'y git this heah pin back, so I ast Vangeline woul'n't she go to the pitcher show with me, an' she went. An' right off I seen that gal di'n't have no sense atall. Does you know, Frenzie—does you know that woman was ack-chuly in love with you?"

“W-w-w-was?” stammered Frenzie hopelessly.

“Yeh—was! An’ I says ‘was’ ’cause they wa’n’t on’y one thing fo’ me to do an’ that was to git you outen her clutches. So I took a heap of my vallible time off an’ splained to her ve’y careful an’ ve’y tho’ough what a no-’count, wuthless, good-fo’-nothin’, splay-footed, none-thinkin’, useless piece of trash you is. An’ it’s done tuk me th’ee of the last five nights to splain it to her. But they ain’t no man cain’t say Roopert Samp don’ do what he sets out to—an’ I done it.”

“D-d-done which?”

“Gotten you free from her. I done fell her out of love with you.”

Somehow Frenzie did not experience any overwhelming surge of gratitude for his friend’s thoughtful efforts in behalf of his future peace and comfort.

“But the pin, Roopert—where’d you git that?”

“Offen Vangeline.”

“How—how come?”

“Oh”—Roopert, once again in control of the situation, waved an insouciant hand—“she gimme that!”

“Give it to you?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Why—why she give you that pin?”

Roopert had the grace to flush. More—he turned his back on his friend and walked to the window, where he stood gazing out along the not unpretty tree-lined thoroughfare.

“Oh, she jes’ gimme!”

“‘Jes’ gimme’ don’ splain nothin’.”

Roopert flung round.

“Ain’t it nachel that while I was fallin’ her out of love with you I should of fell her in love with me? Ain’t it? I asts you that! How could she he’p lovin’ me after sperienцин’ sumthin’ like you? An’ tha’s how come she to give me this heah sapphire pin, Frenzie. Soht of a delicate token of her love.”

“Love fo’ you?”

“You said it! C’n you blame her, I asks you?”

Frenzie stood quivering with grief. He was in a state of mental turmoil, unable to differentiate which from how. All that stood out was that Vangeline was lost to him, his simple ecstatic dream of love gone kerflooie. He extended a limp and listless hand.

“Well—”

“Well, which?”

“Gimme my pin.”

“Yo’ pin?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Which pin?”

“The one you is got on yo’ buzzum.”

“You is talkin’ foolishment—yo’ pin!”

“Huh? Ain’t you jest splained—”

“I ain’t splained nothin’ ’bout this heah bein’ yo’ pin. You give it to Vangeline, di’n’t you?”

“Yeh.”

“An’ she gimme it, di’n’t she?”

“You says.”

“Then I asts you”—triumphantly—“whose pin is it? If’n you had any mo’ sense’n a jinny yo’d see plain as day an’ night it’s my pin.”

The brain of Mr. Frenzie Gillings was nothing much on speed of operation, but it was long on quality production. An idea once absolutely and completely incubated in Mr. Gillings’ cranium at least came into the world with the virtue of stamina. And Mr. Frenzie Gillings was slowly and painfully having an idea. The idea had to do with Mr. Roopert Samp and was not overly complimentary to that gentleman. For this first time in his under-dog acquaintanceship Mr. Gillings was allowing himself the luxury of considering whether he might not have received a little the worst of the deal from his partner.

Very slowly but very positively Frenzie was sprouting a feeling of intense personal resentment with Mr. Samp as the resented. He gazed

steadfastly at a torn place in the carpet and thought—and thought—and thought yet some more. The events of the immediate past marshaled themselves in damning array—Roopert's mayhem upon his person through the agency of a decrepit automobile and the blighting aftermath of a defunct insurance company; the refusal of Roopert to extend even a tithe of his worldly capital to assuage Frenzie's gnawing hunger pangs; Roopert's bland destruction of his one-and-only love affair. And now—to place the last straw meticulously upon the breaking back of the docile camel—the claimed ownership of the cherished pin.

Frenzie's thoughts took words unto themselves even before they were shaped very clearly in Frenzie's mind.

"Roopert Samp," he said slowly, "tha's my pin!"

"Huh, all you is sayin' is words!"

"I wan's my pin back."

"Wantin' ain't gittin'. I is 'shame' of you, Frenzie—after all what I is done. What you ain't got is no 'preciation."

Frenzie raised his eyes and they met and held Roopert's gaze. He spoke in a queer droning monotone.

"You ain't gwine gimme it?"

"What you think—"

“Is you or ain’t you?”

“I ain’t!”

Frenzie said nothing and there was something disconcerting in the way he said it. Too, there was something decidedly determined and out of character in the way he turned to the door and limped across the room with never a backward glance. Apparently the whole ghastly episode had been forgotten. But Roopert was uneasy and knew he had cause to be. He was after the departing one in a bound and dropped a heavy hand on Frenzie’s shoulder.

“Where you gwine to?” he demanded nervously.

Frenzie did not even turn.

“Take yo’ han’s offen me, Mistuh Samp!”

Roopert took. He regarded Frenzie with a growing wonder—and fear.

“I ’clare to goodness—”

“I ain’t studyin’ ’bout what you ’clares to. Ise gwine.”

“Where to?”

“You is gwine fin’ out plenty quick.”

And Frenzie resumed his painful exit.

Roopert tried to bluff it out. He stood it as long as was humanly possible and then—

“Frenzie!”

“Huh?”

“Le’s ’scuss this heah thing over.”

“‘Tain’t nothin’ to ‘scuss.”

“You ain’t even tol me where you is gwine to.”

Frenzie condescended to turn. His tone was merely conversational.

“Fust off,” he vouchsafed quietly, “I is gwine to the p’lice station an’ have you ‘rested fo’ crim’nal an’ careless drivin’ when you run into me. Also I is gwine have you ‘rested fo’ not havin’ no license on yo’ car. Also fo’ fraud. Also fo’ cumsspiracy to do the ‘surance comp’ny outen some money. Also—”

Roopert was beside him, face blanched to a Nile green, big fingers fumbling with the safety catch of the pin. He withdrew the jewel from his scarf and extended it to Frenzie. Quietly, calmly, concealing well the exultation he felt, Frenzie accepted his property. Then with the air of a conqueror he limped down the stairway and into the street, oblivious to the somewhat sobby overtures of his erstwhile friend. Frenzie was almost happy—almost, but not quite. The “almost” rose from the feeling of emancipation; the “not quite” was Vangeline Hood.

When romance enters the life of a man but once and then long after adolescence it usually enters with a bang. The case of Frenzie Gillings was no exception to the rule. Frenzie had

loved late, loved hard and apparently loved unwisely. That he had rescued the treasure-trove he intrusted to his lady love was but small solace in view of the fact that he had lost her. He didn't exactly blame Vangeline for preferring the multitudinous charms of Roopert Samp to his own physical and mental imperfections, but he did think she might have used a trifle more tact. Lack of tact—that was it. If'n she jes' nachelly had to go an' give that pin away to another feller why'n she be decent 'bout it an' not s'lec' Roopert Samp? And so though he did not blame her he experienced a righteous resentment and he fully intended that she should know it. He felt that his matrimonial goose was cooked. At least he should have the slight satisfaction of knowing that Vangeline would not envision him dying of a broken heart.

He ambled sadly and painfully toward the hospital, intent on letting Vangeline see that he had freed himself from Roopert's yoke. He turned the corner and—almost collided with Vangeline; Vangeline—a vision in a new coat suit of maroon. He stopped short, his heart pit-patting rapidly, the grand passion of his life welling into his eyes and making it difficult for him to maintain his poise of injured manhood. Her eyes fastened hungrily upon the wizened face of Frenzie, then upon his sapphire scarfpin.

"Oh, honey," she exclaimed, "you is got it back!"

Frenzie ducked.

"Which?"

"Yo' pin."

"Yeh—what that to you?"

"Ev'rything, da'lin'. I is so glad—heah!" She opened her hand bag and extracted therefrom a roll of bills held by a rubber band. She slipped it into his hands. "Count 'em, Frenzie, count 'em."

Dazedly Frenzie did as bidden. He looked up.

"Fifty dollars?"

"That's right—fifty dollars."

"B-b-but what—"

"It's all your'n, honey—it's all your'n."

Frenzie took a fresh grip on himself.

"Where you git this heah money from?"

"Offen Roopert Samp," she answered happily.

"Roopert!"

"Uh-huh!"

"How—how come him—"

"He paid me them fifty dollars fo' the stick pin."

Frenzie gulped violently.

"He paid you—fo' the pin?"

"Uh-huh."

Roopert had paid Vangeline for the sapphire

pin! As proof positive Vangeline had given him the purchase price. And Roopert had quite evidently paid her every cent he owned, barring a few paltry dollars. The conclusion was obvious. If Roopert had paid Vangeline fifty dollars for the pin he had lied in telling Frenzie that Vangeline had succumbed to his charms and made him a gift of it. Knowing Roopert, Frenzie realized that it was just such a bit of self-glorification as Roopert would naturally resort to.

"S-s-'splain it," pleaded Frenzie, "an' please, ma'am, splain it tho'ough."

And Vangeline splained. She splained that the day after Frenzie had made her a gift of the pin she had been removed from the colored ward and that in the course of her duties a jewelry expert had happened into the hospital.

"An' he took one look at the pin," she went on, "an' tol' me it wa'n't nothin' on'y a piece of glass wuth p'raps two dollars cash money. An' like 'twas puffec'ly right I got sore at you countin' I thought you shoul'n't of give me fake joolry. That was why you di'n't see no mo' of me on my off hours an' tha's how come I go with Roopert Samp when he 'vited me out to the pitcher show.

"An' then I begun to think, an', Frenzie, the

on'y thought I thunk which was wuth while was that I loved you an' I coul'n't he'p it. An' all 'long Roopert kep' tryin' to make love to me an' a talkin' 'bout that pin an' how much he wanted it, an' I was thinkin' how much I loved you an' how dirty he had done you in runnin' over you like he done an' then tryin' to win me away from you fo' brawtus—an' I soht of thought he ought to be made to suffer. So I fin'ly sold him the fake pin fo' fifty dollars. An' now, honey, you is got yo' money an' yo' pin both."

"An' you!" breathed Frenzie in ecstasy.

"An' me"—she hesitated. "But how come you to git that pin back from Roopert?"

And then Frenzie told his story, told it graphically, allowing no false modesty to blind his new glory. Finally he finished and she possessed herself of his hands.

"He jes' tol' you that lie, Frenzie, so's I an' you woul'n't never be frien's ag'in. But now—well—I is done got you a job down to the hospital, Frenzie. They needs a orderly down there an' I an' you c'n be together constant an'—"

Frenzie was very happy. He nodded his acceptance and then broke into a full laugh.

"Bouten that pin, Vangeline," he chortled.

"Yeh?"

"Co'se I is knowed all 'long it wa'n't a real

sapphire, which is why I never would pawn it, 'countin' I coul'n't. But it jes' soht of struck me that us two is the on'y ones knows it ain't ginuwine. So I want you to wear it ag'in. An' I siggess's that we tell on'y one other pusson that it ain't wuth nothin'."

"Name which?" queried Vangeline, her eyes twinkling.

"Roopert Samp," laughed Frenzie. "'Tha's one secret he'll be jes' nachelly boun' to keep!"

MISTUH MACBETH

THE Montgomery Accommodation groaned its way under the venerable train shed of the L. & N.'s Birmingham station. Once there it gratefully ceased to travel. So did Florian Slappey. That languid, bored little Afro-American fashion plate, looking only slightly the worse for wear, swung grandly through the gates, straw suitcase in hand. He progressed down Morris Avenue to Eighteenth Street, turned southward, crossed the railroad tracks and set his eye on the dingy little frame structure between Avenues B and C which was temporarily favored as his boarding place.

Florian was happy. Not that he had failed to enjoy his sojourn in Montgomery, but after all was said and done Birmingham was his home. The provincialism of his racial brethren in the neighboring cities bored him to extinction. He waved condescendingly to several acquaintances, slowed his pace considerably that he might not appear to be too happy, and—

His keen eye lighted on the placard. He ceased to locomote, and he continued to cease. He placed his suitcase gently on the sidewalk

and looked upon the placard with the eye of a connoisseur. It was a good placard, as such things go; a delicious vermilion decorated with much large black type, out of which a single name stood forth as though blazoned in gold. Florian mumbled to himself:

“L. Jupiter Jones! Hmph! Who this heah L. Jupiter Jones is?”

Florian approached more closely and meticulously spelled out the flamboyant announcement:

UPLIFTING EDUCATIONAL JAZZY

A MONSTROUS MAMMOTH PRODUCTION OF
THE GRIPING DRAMA

MACBETH

By Wm. Shakespeare and
L. JUPITER JONES

Will be Held on Tuesday Evening, the Nine-
teenth, Under the Auspices of The Sons and
Daughters of I Will Arise at There Lodge
Rooms

Under the Personal Direction of MR. L. JUPI-
TER JONES—and with MR. L. JUPITER
JONES himself personally playing the roll of
MACBETH.

Also the following cast of characters:

MACBETH.....	MR. L. JUPITER JONES
Mrs. Macbeth.....	Mrs. Chlorine Gannit
King Duncan.....	Lawyer Evans Chew
MacDuff.....	Mr. Simian Gannit
Mrs. MacDuff.....	Mrs. Delight Sabb
Banquo.....	Mr. Anopheles Ricketts
His Ghost.....	Mr. Anopheles Ricketts
Lennox.....	Dr. Brutus Herring, D.D.S.
Ross.....	Mr. Cass Driggers
Monteith.....	Mr. Urias Nesbit
Angus.....	Mr. March Clisby
Fleance.....	Mr. Cleophus White
Siward.....	Mr. Semore Mashby
Witches.....	Missis Magnolia Morton, Christeen Gethers and Callie Flukers.

—AND ET SETERA—

SEE { Bloody scrap between MACBETH and
Macduff!
Mrs. Macbeth walking in her sleep!
Barnum wood moving to Dunsinane!
Banquo's Ghost Sitting at the Table!
One half dozen Terrible Murders!

EXCITEMENT THRILLS BLOOD

TICKETS: Including Lady & Gent—Fifty Cents
cash

8:30 p.m. o'clock

COME ONE

COME ALL

Florian experienced a feeling of righteous resentment. Before his eyes was mute evidence of treason—the typed history of social usurpation. Florian did not know Mr. L. Jupiter Jones, but he was quite sure that Mr. L. Jupiter Jones had in some manner succeeded in becoming a very important figure in the world of Birmingham's colored élite in an extremely short space of time. Which indicated that Mr. Jones was a personage of considerable presence and no mean ability.

Before Florian's eyes were the names of the worth while in colordom, all meekly subordinated to the glittering Mr. Jones. More; the name of Florian Slappey was glaringly conspicuous by its absence.

He reread the announcement and mentally girded his loins for a fracas. Absent in Montgomery, some stranger had seen fit temporarily to assume his laurels. Very well—from over his right shoulder came a voice; an insinuatingly female voice of extreme nasal qualities:

“Mawnin', Brother Slappey.”

Florian whirled to face the angular form and sharp features of Sis Callie Flukers. Florian

detested Sis Callie, but he paid due respect to her powers as human storehouse of all the community's gossip. Sis Callie was justly reputed to know more and to take a greater delight in telling it than all the other women of all the sewing circles in Birmingham. Florian hit straight from the shoulder.

"You is a witch, Sis Callie."

"Ise which?"

"Witch. Tha's what the sign says."

"Oh, that! Yassuh, Ise a witch. Though I done tol' Brother Jones I could of played Mis' Macbeth better'n Chlorine Gannit, an'—"

"I reckon he thunk you fitted the witch paht better, Sis Callie." Florian paused, and then, "Who this heah L. Jupiter Jones is, anyway?"

Sis Callie arched her eyebrows.

"Ain't you hearn?"

"No, but I espec's to right promp'."

Sis Callie heaved a deep and happy sigh. Here was a man actually inviting her to air a wonderful fund of information regarding the stranger who had recently come within Birmingham's gates. It was an opportunity calculated to make Sis Callie happy for many months to come, and she went to it with a vengeance.

"Brother L. Jupiter Jones is a actor. He come heah to the vaudeveel house down on Eighteenth Street with Nick Emerson's Jazz

Babies, an' fo' some reason he di'n't go when they did. All along he pertended he gotten some money but it's my pussonal 'pinion he was broke fum the fust, which is why he went to Simian Gannit."

"Simian?"

"You remember Simian was 'lected the new treasury of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, an' which I is got an idee Brother Jones went to him to borry money. Which is how come him to meet up with Chlorine."

"Simian's wife?"

"Tha's which."

"Now I don't b'lieve in succulatin' no scandal, Brother Slappey, but you know well as me that Chlorine is soht of pretty, an' she is always 'lowed as she'd make a wonderful actress. An' when Brother Jones come along, what with him bein' a actor an' her wantin' to ac'—well, all I is sayin' is that Brother Simian Gannit is been a plumb fool."

"How come?"

"He stayed down to the Gannits' house fo' a couple of days, an' I always is gwine b'lieve it was Chlorine's idee that Brother Jones should git up a play fo' The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise on a fifty-fifty 'greement. That is gwine give Brother Jones a heap of money, an' also 'low Chlorine to show off tryin' to play

Mis' Macbeth, which I is said fum the fust she ain't able to do. An' Brother Jones is gwine be sorry, 'countin' Simian Gannit—Chlorine's husban'—ain't ontirely blind, even if'n he is a fool."

"Blin' 'bout which?"

"The way Mistuh Jones is been ca'vin' on with Chlorine. It's somthin' scand'lous. Re-heahsin' private with her all the time an' make a specktickle outen theyse'ves. Anyway"—righteously—"it's a long worm which ain't got no turnin', an' when Simian an' Delight Sabb fin's out what I knows—"

"What the Widder Sabb is gotten to do with it?"

"Mistuh Jones is boardin' with her now."

"I thought you said—"

"You thought ain't is. Brother Jones did board with Simian an' Chlorine, but afterward he went an' tuk him a room down to the Widder Sabb's house. Which I says ain't decint, on 'count no matter what anyone says 'bouten Sis' Sabb, she sho' is a pretty woman, an' they is a'ready talk 'bouten her an' Brother Jones bein' engage'."

Florian extended a restraining hand.

"Jes' one minute, Sis Callie! Lemme git this heah thing straight. You means that Brother Jones is gittin' up this Macbeth show fo' the

lodge an' is gwine git half the money they takes in?"

"Yeh."

"An' that they is a scandal on account Chlorine Gannit is playin' his wife in the show?"

"Not ontirely on 'count of that, Flo'ian. It's that an' the way they is been actin', which ev'ybody is saw 'ceptin' Simian an' Delight Sabb."

"An' you says fu'ther," persisted Florian, "that Mistuh Jones is got him a boardin' down to Delight Sabb's house?"

"Yeh, an' that Sis Sabb is done los' her fool head over him. That man is got a way with him, Flo'ian. He says a heap an' he says it frequent. An' he says it so's the wimmin all believes him. You mahk my words"—her voice dropped a tone and she stepped confidentially closer—"they's gwine be trouble heah befo' ve'y long!"

Florian stepped back.

"You is a cheerful soht of pusson, Sis Callie."

"Wait'll Brother Simian gits s'picious," prophesied Callie. "Jes' wait!"

Florian picked up his suitcase and started down the street.

"Ise waitin'," he said briefly. "G'-by, Sis Callie."

Florian reached his boarding house, changed his clothes, asked information of his landlady and sallied forth again. Two or three times he stopped to inquire as to the whereabouts of Mr. L. Jupiter Jones. He finally located the stranger in the lodge rooms of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise. For a few minutes Florian stood in the doorway inspecting the other as he moved vaingloriously about the tiny platform instructing a corps of two amateur electricians in the arrangement of footlights for the impending dramatic spectacle.

In spite of a prepared antagonism, Florian found himself rather attracted to the man he had expected to despise. There was an air about the large, well-proportioned figure of L. Jupiter Jones—an aura of confidence which commanded respect from all those within its hypnotic zone.

L. Jupiter wore no coat, but his soft-collared pink-silk shirt with its flowing bow tie of a deep crimson gave to him an artistic appearance which was, to say the least, fetching. His manner was that of a man who knew what he wanted done and intended having it done just that way. He raised his eyes as Florian entered, glanced briefly and disinterestedly at Florian's sartorial perfections, and went on with his supervisory work.

Florian edged forward. One or two of the

men lounging about raised respectful eyes and nodded greetings. L. Jupiter Jones paid him scant heed. Florian insinuated himself before the other, flâneured against a two-by-four upright and tried to appear nonchalant.

“Evenin’,” suggested Florian.

“Evenin’,” returned Mr. Jones uninterestedly.

“Is you Mistuh L. Jupiter Jones?”

“Folks says I is.”

Mr. Jones turned his back to Florian. It was obvious that he neither knew nor cared anything about the gentleman. Florian squirmed.

“I is Florian Slappey,” he remarked at length.

The answer came from Mr. Jones in an indifferent tone:

“Is you?”

“Yes, I is.”

Again the conversation languished. Florian made a final despairing effort:

“Ise secretary of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise.”

Mr. Jones turned slowly, surveyed Florian from gray velours hat to patent-leather shoes.

“You is?”

“Yes, I is.”

“Hmph! You is sho’ secretary of sumthin’ anyway.”

“Say, lookit heah”—Florian started forward in momentary peevishness. “I wan’s to make talk with you.”

Jupiter turned.

“Why’n’t you say so then? Me—I is the ve’y pink of cuttesy.”

“Bein’ secretary of the lodge, I wan’s to request a few info’mations. Does you git me?”

Jupiter’s mellifluous voice came easily in immediate answer:

“Yo’ meanin’, ’tain’t deep like’n to a well, n’r neither ’tain’t so wide like’n to a chu’ch do’, but ’tis enough. ’Twill serve.”

Florian’s eyes widened.

“Who said sumthin’ ’bouten a chu’ch?”

“Nobody. I was merely quotin’ Brother Shakspeare.”

“Well, I talks English. Now I is gotten a few questions to ast you.”

“I reckoned them rhapsody of words might of meant sumthin’.” Jupiter met Florian’s eyes squarely. “Shoot!”

“You is preducin’ a show called Macbeth fo’ the lodge, ain’t you?”

“Yeh.”

“On a fifty-fifty ’greement?”

“You is a knowin’ man, Brother Slappey.”

Florian’s tone became matter-of-fact.

“You ain’t got me in it.”

“Ain’t I?”

“No, you ain’t.”

“Well then, I ain’t.”

“But I’m tellin’ you you is got to.”

“Got to which?”

“Gimme a paht to play.”

“Sorry”—L. Jupiter Jones turned away.

“All the rôles which I an’ Mistuh Shakspeare wrote into that show is done been filled. They ain’t no job fo’ you.”

Florian stood stock-still. Here was insurrection which brooked no soft measures. He whirled and made an ignoble exit. Ten minutes later he was closeted with Isaac Gethers, president of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, and Simian Gannit, its mammoth heavily muscled treasurer. Florian told his troubles graphically and profanely.

“An’,” he wound up, “I gits me a paht in that they Macbeth show an’ I gits it right now.”

“’Tis a pity,” broke in Simian mournfully, “that you ain’t a woman.”

“How come so?”

“If’n you was you could take my wife’s paht. I was ag’in Chlorine actin’ in the fust place.”

“What you is sore ’bout?”

Simian shook his big head slowly from side to side.

It was quite plain that the giant husband of

the pretty girl who was cast opposite Mr. L. Jupiter Jones was more or less in the grip of the green-eyed monster.

"Nothin' special. But Chlorine is a young gal, an' Mistuh Jones is got a way with him."

"Got a way is right," snapped Mr. Slaphey. "But this heah time he ain't gwine git away with his way. Le's go down an' see him, Brother Gethers, an' let him know I is jes' nachelly got to play in his show."

But Brother Gethers was busy, and Brother Simian Gannit volunteered with suspicious willingness. They broke into the lodge rooms like a freight locomotive and a tiny tender. The face of Mr. L. Jupiter Jones remained impassive at sight of Simian. If he was afraid of the husband whose jealous ire he had roused he gave no sign.

But afraid or not, there was no mistaking the fact that in demanding that Mr. Slaphey be promptly accorded a rôle in Macbeth Mr. Gannit intended to have his way. Jupiter shrugged.

"They ain't ary paht lef'," he alibied.

"You he'ped write the play," said Simian Gannit. "Chlorine done tol' me same."

"Well—"

"That bein' the case, you is got to write sumthin' in fo' Mistuh Slaphey heah. Ain't it so, Florian?"

“You said it, Brother Gannit!”

It became plain to Mr. L. Jupiter Jones that as these gentlemen were officers of prominence in the lodge under whose auspices the play was to be given they had better be placated.

“It’s a hahd job,” he said unctuously, “but as me an’ Brother Shakspere says, ‘Bring me to the test, and I the matter will write over ag’in.’ Brother Slaphey, I takes the utmostes’ pleasuah an’ delight in infohmin’ you that you is gwine have a paht wrote in fo’ you by t’-morry mawn-in’. Anythin’, I says, to ’blige a frien’.”

The following evening two colored youths traveled through the streets upon the fences of which had been posted placards announcing the production of Macbeth. Upon each of the vermillion placards a strip was pasted beneath the cast of characters. The strip read as follows:

HAMLET—MR. FLORIAN SLAPPEY

Thereafter life flowed very smoothly for Mr. L. Jupiter Jones, and if he failed to realize that he had started something which bade fair to finish itself it was because he had entered wholeheartedly into the monster mammoth production which was to gain for him wealth and local fame incalculable.

L. Jupiter Jones knew his Shakspere as he

had known his comedy straight in Nick Emerson's Jazz Babies, from which tab show he had abruptly parted company upon their departure from Birmingham for Nashville. The occasion of that parting had involved a young and pretty married woman whose husband played the character comedy rôle. Mr. Jones had been blissfully unconscious of the fact that the low comedian's wife had become passionately enamored of him until the comedian in question mentioned the fact and suggested that the immediate resignation of Mr. Jones was all that could prevent sudden and sanguinary hostilities. Whereupon Mr. Jones, being himself a member of the New Orleans Chapter of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, had sought and made the acquaintance of Mr. Simian Gannit. Immediately thereafter had come his introduction to Chlorine, Simian's pretty little wife, mention of the fact that he was an actor—and a resurrection of her old ambition to tread the boards.

L. Jupiter Jones leaped headlong into the scheme. It meant many dollars and a siege of work that he loved. He assembled his cast and started rehearsals. The talk that circulated was complimentary neither to Mr. Jones nor Mrs. Gannit, who was cast as Lady Macbeth. Nor did his sudden shifting of abode to the polite boarding house owned and operated by

the wealthy and comely Mrs. Delight Sabb cause the gossips' tongues to become less acid. Had L. Jupiter Jones been blessed with poorer facial control trouble would have been stillborn. But years of footlight experience had imparted an unfathomable inscrutability of countenance, and there were none who knew—unless it be the lady herself—that Mr. L. Jupiter Jones had fallen wildly, violently, genuinely and absorbingly in love with Mrs. Sabb.

Jupiter's capitulation to the manifold feminine charms of Mrs. Sabb was as complete as it was sudden. It left even Jupiter tongue-tied in the presence of the woman whose slave he had on the instant become. In the sanctuary of his room in her house he wrote sonnet after sonnet paying tribute to her beauty, but each was destroyed in a fit of bashfulness. The fact that she was a woman of means did not affect him. His love for Delight was as unsmirched by commercialism as the passion of Abelard for Héloïse. In brief, L. Jupiter Jones had for the first time in his life fallen for a woman—and the fall was hard!

Delight Sabb was a widow in a million. She was pretty in a deliciously soft chocolate-creamy way. She had poise and considerable education. And she was sensible enough not to let Mr. Jones see that his passion was recipro-

cated. Mrs. Sabb's first matrimonial venture had been successful only in the amount of life insurance which the defunct spouse had unwillingly bequeathed her upon the occasion of his flirtation with a mail train, and she was taking it slow and easy on her second attempt.

And so L. Jupiter Jones blundered along, his love for Delight Sabb blinding him to the fact that Birmingham's colored folk found rich gossip in his intimacy with the wife of the mammoth Simian Gannit. In Chlorine Mr. Jones saw only a woman who promised to be an excellent foil for his histrionic talents. The very fact that she was a hopelessly bad actress assured his possession of the spot-light position when the play should be produced. As a woman he did not know she existed, the trouble being that Simian did not know that Jupiter didn't care, and that Simian cared a very great deal.

Simian had heard gossip. In fact, everyone had heard the gossip save L. Jupiter Jones and Mrs. Delight Sabb. And because the Widow Sabb had not heard and was not suspicious, she continued to keep company with L. Jupiter Jones, and it was this fact—and this fact alone—which had thus far prevented Simian from exploding.

“Mistuh Jones is rushin' Delight Sabb, ain't he?” he snapped once when a friend volunteered

the suggestion that something should be done to save the Gannit honor.

“They’s mo’ men’n him which has played two wimmin off ’gainst each other,” came the cheerful response.

“Delight ain’t no fool. If’n she thunk they was anythin’ betwix’ my wife an’ Mistuh Jones she’d bust off with him. An’ if’n she don’ b’lieve it, then I ain’t gwine to.”

“But s’posin’ she should bust off with him, Simian; would that prove sumthin’ to you?”

Simian nodded slowly, whilst the enormous muscles of his forearm tensed.

“If’n Delight Sabb ever jines in the talk which folks is talkin’, then all I is got to say is that Bumminham is gwine git along ’thout no Macbeth in Macbeth.”

No word of this came to L. Jupiter’s ears. He was absorbed in rehearsals of his play and his love for Delight Sabb. At times he dared believe that she might eventually consent to be his, and at times she was almost convinced that his love was genuine and not mercenary. Until—

It was the eighteenth day of the month—thirty hours before the curtain was due to rise upon the first act of the jazzed-up production of Macbeth. Mrs. Delight Sabb and Sis Callie Flukers were strolling down Eighteenth Street. Sis Callie led the way into an alley. It so hap-

pened that on the corner of that particular alley and Eighteenth Street the home of the Gannits was located. From the alley a plain view was afforded of the Gannit dining room. The month was May, the weather warm, the windows raised.

“Lookit there!” sibilated Sis Callie.

Delight needed no further instructions. She looked—and as she looked her heart cracked. She saw L. Jupiter Jones’ strong arms encircle the form of Chlorine Gannit and she heard his resonant voice:

“Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swears, that sticks silver tips on all them fruit trees—”

She saw Chlorine strive ineffectually to extract herself from the embrace as her words came back.

“Don’ you go swearin’ by that moon, that unconstant moon, les’ thy love go prove variable too.”

And Jupiter’s passionate retort: “I swears by ev’ything what is, fair gal, that all the love which men has had in this heah world ain’t nothin’ on’y a fake compared to the love Ise got fo’ you. Upbend yo’ lips to mine an’ let us cling fo’ever.”

The lips of L. Jupiter Jones and Mrs. Chlorine Gannit met. They clung.

Mrs. Delight Sabb departed. So did Sis Cal-

lie Flukers. And Sis Callie went straight to Simian Gannit, where she related in detail the scene she had just witnessed.

"They wa'n't on'y rehearsin'," rumbled Simian.

"Mebbe so they wa'n't," came the answer, "but kisses is kisses, an' the kiss what I seen—"

As a matter of fact they had only been rehearsing—been rehearsing the fourth act of Macbeth as conceived and written by Mr. L. Jupiter Jones. Mr. Jones had seen clearly that Mr. Shakspeare had his defects as a playwright. He had dared write a vehicle for a male star and allow him to be killed in the final act. That, figured Jupiter, was exceedingly faulty dramatic technic.

Thereupon L. Jupiter Jones had rewritten Macbeth and altered the tragedy considerably. He had injected considerable pep into the plot by causing Macduff to return to the castle in disguise and apparently conduct an affair of dishonor with Lady Macbeth. That situation, he knew, was certain to please his audience. It also lent a note of modernity to the play. Accordingly in his revision Macbeth is exceedingly peeved with his wife during the third act. True, she has committed a couple of murders at his behest; but he is not willing to overlook her fancied unfaithfulness with Macduff as the

party of the second part. Intensive interest is thus added to the subsequent meeting of Macbeth and Macduff on the battlefield.

It was in that great stage moment that L. Jupiter Jones had excelled himself. For in his version of the well-known drama Macbeth slays Macduff with a dagger, and in his last dying moments Macduff gasps out a confession that Lady Macbeth is as pure as a new-born daisy. Whereupon Macbeth summons his wife, forgives her, and they play the brief love scene—lifted more or less bodily from another play written by Mr. Shakspeare and known as Romeo and Juliet—in which all ends happily. It was rehearsal of that final gripping scene upon which Sis Callie Flukers and Mrs. Delight Sabb had looked.

L. Jupiter Jones parted from Chlorine Ganit, forgetting even to bid her farewell. He moved blithely down the street toward the boarding house of Delight Sabb. The sun was shining brightly; the little birdies were singing in the trees; the world was indeed a good place in which to live. Of recent days Delight had commenced to unbend. Mr. L. Jupiter Jones, a philosophic solipsist in all affairs save those of the heart, had commenced to hope that there might be some faint ray of chance for him. He had even gone to the extent of making discreet inquiries as to a job.

Things were indeed bright in prospect. According to his contract with The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, as drawn up by Lawyer Evans Chew, he was entitled to fifty per cent of the gate receipts, as and when received. The ticket sale already exceeded his fondest anticipations, and he had pocketed two bits from the price of each ticket sold. Enough money was certain to guarantee him a regular honeymoon if Delight accepted him.

The sable Thespian turned into Twenty-fourth Street, upon which thoroughfare the residence of Mrs. Sabb was located. He quickened his pace, eager to be under the same roof with her again. There was the house, its tiny front yard resplendent with spring flowers, its gate invitingly ajar, the sidewalk before it.

The sidewalk before it! Mr. L. Jupiter Jones stared at the sidewalk before it and became conscious of the fact that something was wrong. There was something on that sidewalk which did not belong there; something which caused a tremor of apprehension to slither through Mr. Jones' anatomy. The something which was on the sidewalk was a trunk; a battered, road-worn trunk of an appearance forbiddingly familiar. Even at a distance Mr. Jones knew that he knew that trunk. He knew that the trunk was his. Of a sudden the sun seemed to slide behind a

cloud and the birdies to cease their caroling. He experienced a gelid trepidation and thrust his hands deep into trousers pockets. That trunk—on the sidewalk—

Closer he came—and closer. He didn't need inspection to tell him that the trunk was his. He glanced first at it, and then at the house. The front door was closed. He looked at the trunk again. It said nothing, but spoke volumes. There was a suspicion crystallizing in the mind of Mr. L. Jupiter Jones that all was not as it should be. Things were wrong—how wrong even he had not yet begun to suspect.

He walked nervously through the gate and put his hand on the knob of the front door. It turned, but the door refused to yield. He pushed harder. From within came a voice—a voice which he recognized as the property of Mrs. Delight Sabb. But its timbre was strange to him. There was in it a hint of tears and more than a hint of animosity.

“Who's there?”

“It's me.”

“Who's you?”

“Jupiter.”

“Jupiter which?”

“L. Jupiter Jones. It's me—which boa'ds with you.”

“Ain’t no L. Jupiter Jones boa’din’ with me. They was a wuthless no-’count cullud man which said that was his name useter stay heah, but he don’ no mo’.”

L. Jupiter Jones leaned limply against the frame of the door. Delight—and angry with him. The day became very murky indeed. A great gob of gloom descended and perched upon the shoulders of his black-and-white-checked suit.

“Delight—”

“Mis’ Sabb is the name I goes by.”

“Mis’ Sabb then.”

“An’ I don’t go by no name with you.”

“They—they mus’ be sumthin’ the matter,” he quavered.

“They is—a plenty.”

“If’n I c’n esplain—”

“You go esplain to Chlorine Gannit. She’s mos’ likely mo’ interusteder than what I is.”

“Esplain to—my gosh! Delight, you ain’t gone an’ thunk that I is interusted in that gal!” There was real horror in his voice.

“If’n you ain’t interusted in her, then you is sho’ly the greatest actor which is.”

“I—I—ain’t care a snap on my fingers fo’ her. I swears—”

Delight’s voice came to him through the door, cold and hard.

"If'n you don' git away fum heah with yo' trunk you is gwine swear sho' nuff!"

"B-b-but what you said 'bouten me an' Chlorine—"

"I ain't sayin' nothin' I don' know!"

"They ain't nothin' between I an' her."

"If'n they ain't they oughter be!"

"Delight, I—I—"

L. Jupiter Jones found himself at loss for words. It was then that Mr. Shakspere came to his aid. His voice took on a soft and pleading nuance as he delivered a speech from Coriolanus: "Darlin', I swears Ise chaste like'n to an icicle tha's curdled by the fros' from pures' snow an' hangs on Dian's temple. An'—an' that's the hones'-to-Gawd's truth, Mis' Sabb."

"Hmph! You is gwine git chased pretty quick! Now git!"

"But Delight—"

"Git!"

"I never—"

"Git!"

Mr. L. Jupiter Jones got! He got away and he got a truck to tote his trunk to Sally Crouch's Cozy Home Hotel. To Sally he explained that he had decided to move from the domicile of Delight Sabb. Sally, portly of frame though she was, had a mind exceedingly nimble, and she put two and two together and made eleven. Despite

his being the actor that he was, L. Jupiter Jones had not been even a trifle successful in concealing his lugubriousness. It was not until the following morning that Sally found Sis Callie Flukers and told to that skinny and acidulous lady the story of L. Jupiter's advent to the Cozy Home Hotel. Sis Callie's eyes sparkled with divine mischief, and she hied straightway to the coal yard where the giant Simian Gannit was employed as driver. To Simian she told the story of L. Jupiter's change of residence.

"So there y'are," she finished triumphantly.

"There I is which?"

"Ain't you said yo' ownse'f that the reason you di'n't pay no 'tention to the scandal bouten yo' wife, Chlorine, an' this heah L. Jupiter Jones was cause'n Delight Sabb went on keepin' company with him?"

"Yeh."

"An' ain't you reemahked that if'n she ever busted off with him that'd be proof that things what folks was sayin' was so?"

Simian was not especially long on mental agility, but this conclusion had been driven home with a trip hammer. He had watched and seen and suspected. Now Delight Sabb had clinched things for him. He rose to his feet, towering menacingly above Sis Callie's attenuated form. It was these very Herculean proportions which

had prompted L. Jupiter to cast Simian in the rôle of Macduff—that his battlefield triumph in the last act might be enhanced in dramatic value. But now the huge muscles writhed with fury.

“Go on away, Sis Callie.”

“Me?”

“Yeh—you.”

“Ain’t you gwine do nothin’, Simian?”

“Yeh, Ise gwine think!”

Sis Callie went, and Simian thought. He thought harder and longer than he had ever done before in his simple unaffected life. And there was good cause, for if ever woman was loved by man, Chlorine was by Simian.

Sis Callie lost no time in circulating her end of the toothsome scandal. The news spread like wildfire, gaining in tragic potentiality with every retelling. Those in charge of the ticket sale for that night’s performance of Macbeth were besieged by eager bidders for reserved seats. The situation had developed an emotional appeal that even the mind of Mr. William Shakspeare had never anticipated. For that night was to be presented Macbeth. In the title rôle was to be seen Mr. L. Jupiter Jones. Opposite him was his supposed *femme de coeur*—Chlorine Gannit. Playing Macduff was her husband, and as Lady Macduff was the widow who

formed the fourth side of the quadrilateral. Even Florian Slappey—suffering from acute pre-stage fright for fear he might forget his brief lines as the melancholy Dane—found himself rising to heights of enthusiasm at what the evening might hold in store.

The performance was scheduled to start at eight-thirty o'clock. By seven-forty every seat in the lodge rooms was occupied, and long lines of disappointed spectators were offering premiums for choice seats. By eight-fifteen extra prices were being offered, and refused, for any sort of a seat. At eight-twenty the doors were closed, every seat and every available inch of standing room having been filled.

The day had been a miserable one for three persons—for L. Jupiter Jones, for Simian Gan-nit and for Chlorine, his adoring young wife, who had not been able to fathom her huge husband's sudden and complete silence toward her. Nor had Mrs. Delight Sabb been experiencing any delirium of happiness.

Of the quartet L. Jupiter Jones arrived first at the theater. He was greeted affably at the stage door by Keefe Gaines, the perennially smiling undertaker. The coincidence did not affect L. Jupiter with any surge of delight. He was shaken by premonitions, and he was shaken hard. He repaired immediately to his dressing

room, where he commenced the sad work of fitting himself into his costume.

The male costumes had been designed by L. Jupiter Jones, and were masterpieces of economy. He bent over and rolled up his trousers. Then he stepped into a pair of stockings which had been borrowed from one of his lady friends. Over these he pulled a doublet and a pair of bloomers reaching to the knees. The effect was startlingly mid-Victorian. The whole was heightened by a lady's velveteen hat, which he placed upon his noble brow. The hat was decorated with a large once-white ostrich plume. His belt was of white glazed leather. A sheath had been sewed thereon and in that sheath was fitted a stage dagger—a trick affair the blade of which was designed to slide harmlessly into the hilt at the moment when he was supposed to be plunging it into the faithless heart of Macduff. L. Jupiter Jones had paid cash for those trick knives—one for himself and one for Simian Gannit, who was to play Macduff, and even in rehearsal they had looked horribly realistic. Once costumed, L. Jupiter Jones seated himself on an overturned box to think things over.

Out front all was bustle and turmoil. Florian Slappey, clad in black tights which had once done duty as a feminine union suit and upon which the art of the dyer had been practiced,

ran importantly about the stage getting in everyone's way and trying futilely to assist the stage hands. The three witches—Magnolia Morton, Christeen Gethers and Callie Flukers—fluttered nervously about the flies, tremulous at the thought of having to open the show.

Mrs. Delight Sabb, costumed in a New York model bought from Birmingham's largest department store, took little pleasure in the beautiful picture she reflected in the mirror. True, she was sure that she looked a perfect Lady Macduff, but even that held little of interest to her now. She had lost L. Jupiter Jones. Worse, she had given him up, and the future seemed a dull drab thing.

In the next dressing room the giant Simian clad as Macduff, vouchsafed not a word to his wife, who, garbed in the melancholy white of Lady Macbeth and with blond wig carefully adjusted so that her sleep-walking scene might be more effective, perched tearfully on an old and battered dressing table. Simian finished his dressing, turned and made his exit from the room. He crossed the stage and went straight to Keefe Gaines. His voice was low and confidential.

“You is gwine guard this heah door, Keefe?”

“Yassuh, Simian, I sho'ly is.”

“An' you ain't gwine let nobody gitten out?”

“Not nary soul.”

“Pretickerly L. Jupiter Jones?”

“Pretickerly him.”

“He’s li’ble to try.”

“Let him. Ise bigger’n him, an’ ’sides the do’ is locked.”

“Good.”

“You is espectin’ him to try to git away?”

Simian Gannit eyed the other peculiarly. There was something in his glance which caused even Keefe Gaines, undertaker par excellence though he was, to tremble.

“He’s gwine try git away all right,” postulated Simian. “But you is to see he ain’t to do it.”

“But—”

“Fo’ one thing,” finished Simian, “L. Jupiter Jones is a’ready been paid half of ev’ything which has been tooken in. If’n he was to git scared an’ run fum this heah hall we’d have to give back the ticket money ’cause’n the show di’n’t finish, an’ we’d be a dead loss fo’ all which we had paid him. Is that nuff reason?”

Keefe Gaines nodded.

“Fo’ an undertaker—yes.”

Simian raised his eyes. Across the stage, standing weakly in the wings, was his wife—the personification of tragedy in the white of Lady

Macbeth. Instinctively Simian longed to cross to her, to take her in his arms and protest that he knew his suspicions of her and L. Jupiter Jones were ungrounded. But just at that moment, when his love for his young wife threatened to engulf all other emotions, he saw Delight Sabb leave her dressing room, glare balefully at Chlorine and pass without a word. Simian's teeth clicked together. Delight's suspicions crystallized his own. Had Delight not thrown L. Jupiter over, Simian might have believed that Chlorine had not been untrue. And it was plain that Delight believed of Chlorine and Jupiter what everyone else believed.

And then—the call went up. The three witches took their places on the stage. The blare of Professor Alec Champagne's Jazz-phony Orchestra ceased and the curtain shot to the top of the low proscenium arch. Macbeth had commenced to Macbeth.

Sis Callie Flukers' witchy voice showed a decidedly earthly tremble as she uttered the first lines of the play—"When is we th'ee gwine meet again—in thunder, lightnin', or when it's rainin'?"

Magnolia Morton took her cue.

"When the hurdy-gurdy's done; when the battle's los' an' won."

And then Christeen Gethers.

“That’s gwine be ere the sun sets.”

CALLIE: “Where at?”

MAGNOLIA: “On the hearth.”

CHRISTEEN: “There we is gwine meet Mistuh Macbeth.”

CALLIE: “We’s gwine be there.”

ALL: “Fair is foul an’ foul also is fair; hover in the fog, also air.”

The curtain dropped zigzaggingly upon the first scene. There was a tense silence out front, then a burst of applause led by Spokane G. Washington, who was book-learned. There was a long pause as the scene was shifted.

The play went well. Under other circumstances L. Jupiter Jones would have been in a seventh heaven of triumphant delight. But now he tasted only the bitter dregs. In some manner he and the three other principals of the drama within the drama remembered their lines and managed to wade through their scenes. In fact, save for Florian Slappey, no member of the cast fozzled a speech.

But the acting was mechanical. It lacked the punch and verve and pep for which L. Jupiter Jones had so long and so faithfully striven. But what the actors may have lacked in dramatic punch was more than atoned for by the pall which hung suspended over the stage.

It was there—sans Shakspere, sans lines—

that the drama lay. The actors knew it, the audience knew it. The applause from out front was nervous and expectant, the air behind the scenes pregnant with dire potentialities. And yet for the first three acts nothing happened. But no one was fooled. Everyone knew that something was going to happen. Macbeth, stalking about the stage with the giant Macduff, was aquiver with apprehension. He felt the baleful eye of Simian Gannit upon him and knew that he was playing with Simian Gannit, husband, and not with Macduff as Shakspere had conceived him. The situation was driven home to L. Jupiter during the passionate love scenes—children of his own brain—between Lady Macbeth and Macduff; scenes which had been carefully calculated to rouse the audience's enthusiasm when in the final act Macbeth should kill his friendly enemy and forgive his almost faithless wife. Delight Sabb played her rôle with all the reserve any peeress of the realm could have commanded, and if the woman in her was yearning for a reconciliation with the quiv-ery Macbeth she gave no sign.

Toward the end of the third act L. Jupiter Jones experienced a sudden surge of terror. He didn't know why, save that he was convinced that things were about to happen. He took his curtain calls and finally left the stage

amid enormous applause. But something prompted him to remain in the wings. Doing so, he glanced across the stage through Birnam Wood—and there concealed amidst the foliage he saw Macduff.

But Simian did not see L. Jupiter Jones. Simian was busy. He was intent upon his work. So was L. Jupiter Jones. The actions of Simian Gannit were peculiar. First Simian drew his knife from the sheath. He tested the trick blade. Then he deliberately walked to the window and threw the stage dagger into the alley. Jupiter saw Simian smile. There was something in Simian's smile which did not cause the watching Jupiter any especial happiness. Nor did he dance with glee when he saw Simian reach through his doublet and into the pockets of his everyday trousers and therefrom extract a dagger which was very real indeed, test its edge and drop it into the sheath where the stage dagger was supposed to rest.

Simian turned away, convinced that he had been unobserved; secure in the belief that the foliage of Birnam Wood had screened his substitution of a genuine dagger for the trick one.

But L. Jupiter Jones had seen! And so too had Chlorine Gannit!

L. Jupiter staggered to his dressing room and collapsed limply on a stool upon the seat of

which he had three weeks before elaborately painted a star. In an instant things had become plain to him—too fearfully plain.

Simian Gannit—Macduff—had substituted a genuine dagger for the collapsible stage affair with which his duel with Macbeth was to be fought. The fourth act was at hand—Birnam Wood was destined to move to Dunsinane—Macbeth meet Macduff upon the field of battle—the fight—the flash of a knife—and L. Jupiter Jones shuddered at the prospect of himself pitching headlong upon the stage spitted upon a dagger that was noncollapsible.

The trick was diabolically clever. Macduff would stagger back and step out of his rôle into that of Simian Gannit. He would register horror and regrets! He would claim that L. Jupiter had supplied the dagger and that he himself had believed it was a trick affair.

L. Jupiter Jones shivered and groaned. The prospect of a hereafter was not unpleasing ordinarily, but with that hereafter imminent L. Jupiter Jones decided unanimously that he preferred the mortal coil upon which he had lived for thirty-one pleasant years. He was galvanized into action. From his dressing room he streaked to the stage door. Mr. Keefe Gaines insinuated himself before the struggling actor.

“Wha’s ailin’ you, Mistuh Jones?”

“Lemme out!” wailed Jupiter. “Fo’ Gawd’s sake, lemme out!”

“Cain’t nobody git outen this theayter ontill the show been over.”

“You don’ on’erstan’!” howled Jupiter. “Simian Gannit is gwine kill me!”

“Reckon you is mos’ likely mistaken.”

Jupiter met the eyes of Keefe Gaines, undertaker, and was reminded of the ornate sign which hung before that affable gentleman’s embalming emporium: “We bury others—why not you?” There seemed to be a sinister light in the eyes of Keefe Gaines; the appraising air with which a professional man looks upon a prospective client.

L. Jupiter Jones cringed. Not only had Simian exhibited an unsuspected cleverness in planning Jupiter’s extinction, but his master stroke was the assignment of the undertaker to bar the lone exit. Of course Keefe rather preferred the tragedy. L. Jupiter Jones fled wildly to Florian Slappey, and found that dark and excessively rueful gentleman stalking up and down behind Birnam Wood. To Florian Jupiter retailed his troubles. Florian turned upon him angrily.

“You deserves to git kilt.”

“What is I done?”

“What ain’t you done? Ain’t you done wrote

me a paht of Hamlet I coul'n't even remember?"

No help there! The fourth-act curtain was about ready to ascend. Keefe Gaines had passed the word round that Jupiter was attempting to jump the theater and so ruin the show and make necessary a money refund to the spectators. Glances in which hostility was blended with suspicion were turned upon the miserable star wherever he stepped. And so he stepped into his dressing room.

Meanwhile Chlorine Gannit, who had also seen the substitution of the genuine for the stage dagger, had not been inactive. Her first move was to seek Delight Sabb. Delight froze up as Chlorine entered her dressing room. To Delight Chlorine told the story of Jupiter's impending demise. Delight's eyes widened with horror and she clutched the edge of her chair. But jealousy would not down entirely, even in that crisis.

"You seem mighty interusted 'bouten whether Jupiter gits hisse'f kilt or not."

"I don't keer nothin' 'bout Jupiter Jones," moaned Chlorine. "But I hates to see my husban' git hisse'f 'rested fo' killin' him. Tha's what Ise wo'ied 'bout."

Delight glanced at her closely.

"'Bout you an' Jupiter—ain't you been ca'y-in' on?"

Chlorine raised tear-stained eyes.

"I an' him? My Lawd! Mis' Sabb—what I wan's with a no-'count wuthless actor like'n to Jupiter Jones when I is got my husban'? Ain't you see—ain't you see I don't care 'bouten nobody on'y Simian? I swears to you, Mis' Sabb, Simian is the fondes' thing Ise of!"

Delight believed. And believing, she took command of the situation. She grabbed Chlorine's arm and hustled her from the dressing room.

"You go fin' yo' husban' an' do yo' bes' to call him off; fin' him an'—no, wait a minute!"

Chlorine waited. The call was sent out for places for the final act. Said Delight, "Yo' husban' is on the stage at the beginnin' of the ac', ain't he?"

"Yeh."

"An' you said you seen him th'ow his stage dagger outen the winder into the alley?"

"Yeh."

"Go git it!"

Chlorine went. Keefe Gaines allowed her to leave the hall. She found the dagger easily enough, and returned with it—a cheap, tiny, collapsible affair.

"Now what?" asked the distraught wife.

Delight glanced on the stage. Simian Gannit

was standing rigidly in one place mouthing his lines with a fixed tensity.

“When Simian comes off you ’splain to him; an’ when you ’splains to him you hug him; an’ when you hug him you swipe fum him the dagger which he is got an’ slip this heah fake dagger back in the sheath. On’erstan’?”

Chlorine nodded and sped away. She was waiting in the wings as Macduff made his exit, and she flung herself into his arms. Simian haughtily disengaged her. He refused to speak with her. But when he left her the stage dagger was reposing in his knife sheath and Mrs. Chlorine Gannit took the real one to the window and threw it far into the alley.

The call boy rapped on L. Jupiter Jones’ dressing room door.

“You is mos’ jue to go on, Mistuh Jones.”

L. Jupiter groaned.

“Ain’t gwine on. Ise sick.”

The call boy carried word to Keefe Gaines. Keefe entered L. Jupiter’s dressing room.

“Git on the stage, Brother Jones.”

“Says which?”

“Git on the stage!”

“Ise sick.”

“You is gwine be sicker if’n you don’t!”

There was again that something in the undertaker's eye that warned L. Jupiter Jones. He dragged himself from his dressing room. In the passageway he met Delight Sabb. She stopped him.

"Jupe?"

"Yeh?"

"I is misjedge you."

"You sho'ly has."

"I is sorry."

"So is I."

"I is mo' sorrier'n what you is, Jupe."

"Hmph! You on'y thinks you is."

"Does you love me, Jupe?"

"Yeh."

"I loves you—strong."

"Well—love me quick, 'cause in five minutes I is gwine be ain't!"

"You knows 'bouten the dagger?"

"I knows mo'n that. I knows he's done even got the undertaker heah watching me so's Ise gwine git embalmed quick."

From the stage came Macbeth's cue. The actor in Macbeth responded. Instinctively he started toward the wings. Delight spoke quickly.

"Don't you wo'y 'bouten Simian Gannit, honey. 'Splain to him that I an' Chlorine is frien's an' that we knows you ain't been bad

like'n to what we thunk you was. Then mebbe he won't kill you."

"Mebbe!" grunted Jupiter miserably. "I ain't never heard of mebbe savin' no lives."

Keefe Gaines was at Jupiter's entrance position, and he prodded the unhappy actor.

"Better go th'oo with it," he advised.

Jupiter favored him with a fearful glance.

"Treat me gentle when it's over," said he, "an' be sho' Ise daid."

And then he made his entrance. There was a burst of applause from out front. He was late on his cue, and stage conditions had become static.

Jupiter was trembling. Simian Gannit looked fully a mile high and unbelievably menacing. The situation was very plain. If only Jupiter could make Simian understand that Chlorine and Delight had made friends and mutually forgiven; if only he could get that idea across he realized that the naturally soft-hearted Simian would postpone the massacre—perhaps call it off altogether. If only he could get Simian off stage just long enough for Delight to explain that she had taken Jupiter back to her heart.

Jupiter was shriveling. The battle scene with himself in the rôle of massacree was not overly inviting. What Jupiter did not know was that

the dagger in Simian's girdle was the original stage dagger, incapable of harm. And not knowing it, he suffered a thousand deaths as he delivered his first line:

"They is done tied me to a stake; I cannot fly, but bearlike I is got to fight."

Simian interrupted with an improvised speech:

"You said it, Macbeth! You sho' done said it!"

MACBETH: "Who's you? You wa'n't bohn of woman. Such a one I is got to be skeered of—or none."

MACDUFF: "Gittin' skeered seems to be the on'y thing you don' never do nothin' else but."

MACBETH: "Have mercy, Macduff, befo' I kills you! I assuahs you 'tis all mistaken. Yo' wife an' my gal is done made up."

MACDUFF: "Liar what you is! Yo' hour has come!"

MACBETH: "I tell you ev'ything's all right. Honest t' Gawd it is! They ain't no cause fo' us to fight."

MACDUFF: "Tyrant, lemme see yo' face. If'n thou be kilt an' by no stroke of mine my wife an' chillun's ghos's is gwine ha'nt me. I ain't gwine fight with no bums. Jes' lemme kill you an' I ain't got nothin' mo' to ask!"

MACBETH: "They ain't no reason I should

play the Roman fool an' die on my own dagger. While I see enemies alive the gashes does better on them."

Simian Gannit stepped closer. Jupiter stepped back. If only he could make Simian understand. He dropped his voice to a pleading whisper:

"Hones', Simian, Chlorine an' Delight is done made up."

"You is lyin', cullud man!"

"I swears they has!"

"Ain't!"

"Is!"

"Nossuh!"

"If'n you was shuah of it woul'n't that prove all what you think is so between I an' Chlorine ain't on'y lies?"

"Mebbe so," grunted Simian. "But I is gotten you where I wan's you, an' you ain't gwine git away. So git ready!"

Simian dropped his hand upon the hilt of his dagger. Jupiter cringed as the voice of Macduff boomed across the stage. The audience sat forward tensely.

"Turn, hell-hound, turn!"

MACBETH: "I sho' is tried to git away fum thee. But git thee back! My soul is too much charged with blood of thine a'ready."

MACDUFF: "I have no words. My voice is in

my sword, thou bloodier villyun than anyone is reemahked!"

MACBETH: "I tell you they ain't a thing between I an' yo' wife!"

MACDUFF: "Jes' the same, Macbeth, you is gwine git yourn, an' git it a plenty."

Simian walked across the stage, turned and slipped his dagger part way from the sheath. Then he paused and a look of inquiring surprise crossed his face. For Simian had made the discovery that the dagger he was carrying was the original imitation dagger! No longer was he girded with a vicious thing of steel. Instead someone had placed there the collapsible toy which was incapable of harm. He looked narrowly at L. Jupiter Jones. That gentleman wore a hunted, haunted look in his eyes. It was plain to Simian that Jupiter thought he carried a real dagger.

And as Simian fingered his harmless weapon he saw Jupiter plunge his hands into the pockets of the trousers he wore under his costume.

Jupiter's fingers probed his trousers pocket. And suddenly they closed round something reassuringly hard. For a brief instant a smile crossed the face of L. Jupiter Jones. An idea had come to him. Keeping his hand in his pocket, he turned again toward Simian, and there was an expression upon his face that

brought a surge of terror to the heart of the big man who now knew that the dagger he wore was made of tin!

There was no doubting the fact that L. Jupiter Jones had undergone a transformation. Simian narrowly watched the hand that was in Jupiter's pocket. Perhaps it held a gun, or at least a knife—a genuine knife.

Jupiter radiated confidence, and Simian recalled wild tales he had heard of the scrapping ability of the cornered rat.

Jupiter expected to be murderously attacked, and Jupiter had suddenly become confident of himself. That much was evident. Simian backed away and took counsel with himself. Perhaps he had been too hasty. Perhaps Chlorine and Delight had really made friends after all—and Simian knew that if they had it meant that his suspicions of Chlorine and Jupiter were groundless.

Simian was realizing that he had bitten off a considerably ample chew. He regretted it—and terror came to him. He dropped his voice and attempted to placate L. Jupiter Jones. The shoes had suddenly changed feet. Before it had been L. Jupiter who was sparring for time; now it was Simian who sought to postpone open hostilities.

Said Simian: "They ain't no use why I an' you shoul'n't be frien's, Jupiter."

“Play yo’ paht, Simian. The audience is waitin’.”

“I reckon I is done you an injustice.”

“Play yo’ paht!”

In the wings appeared the terrified Chlorine with her arms about Delight Sabb. Simian saw—and understood that Jupiter had indeed spoken the truth.

“Le’s call this heah fight off, Jupiter.”

“Me an’ Shakspere written this show,” snapped Jupiter, “an’ it gits acted! Come on!”

And then Macbeth stepped into his lines again, that right hand still clutching the hard object in his pocket, his manner easy if watchful, his enunciation clear:

“I will not yield to kiss no groun’ befo’ young Malcolm’s feet, an’ to be baited with the rabble’s curse. Though Barnum Wood come runnin’ to Dunsinane, an’ you ain’t had no mother, yet I will try the las’. Befo’ my body I flings my war-like shield.”

Simian tensed himself. His fearful eyes saw Macbeth’s right hand stealing slowly from the pocket. Gun—or knife? Knife—or gun? He made a last despairing plea:

“Jupiter—please—”

And then L. Jupiter Jones, actor, rose to heights of histrionic grandeur. His vibrant

voice carried to the farthest corner of the hall. His hand emerged from his pocket, clutching something. This something he shook with a peculiar rattling sound. He stooped and sent them clattering merrily across the battlefield, and then he gazed triumphantly at Macduff and then again at the dice which had come to rest with four-three showing.

“Roll on, Macduff,” he declaimed, “an’ see if you can roll ’em good enough!”

HERE COMES THE BRIBE

MRS. MARGERINE SCRUBB heard sounds from the kitchen; suspicious sounds; sounds which served to saturate her bridal heart with fierce jealousy. Mrs. Scrubb passed through the breakfast room and came to an abrupt halt by the kitchen door. From the other side came the hum of voices. Mrs. Scrubb strained her ears in the effort to distinguish words, and despite the seethe within her the instinct of neatness prompted her to smooth the wrinkles from the tiny white apron which covered a small portion of her immaculate black skirt and to adjust the nurse's cap which adorned her shapely head.

Her effort to distinguish words was futile. But she did recognize voices—two voices. One of them belonged to her bridegroom. The other was unmistakably the almost-too-barytony contralto of Clematis Creech, cook. Margerine wrapped her slender fingers carefully about the knob of the kitchen door. She turned it slowly and noiselessly. She allowed it to swing back a few inches. Then, as she peeped through, her newly married heart set up a violent thumping

and she flushed a pale lavender beneath her coat of racial brown. Horrible suspicion had become damning certainty!

Near the highly polished gas range stood her husband of four months, resplendent in the uniform of a chauffeur. Jasper Scrubb, while not much on avoirdupois, cut considerable figure in his uniform. He lacked about six inches of heroic six feet and thirty pounds of ideal weight. But his uniform had been well tailored and it fitted every line of his not-unattractive figure in a manner which was fairly irresistible to the adoring—if jealous—eyes of his ardent young wife.

Mr. Jasper Scrubb was not alone. He was not only not alone but he seemed on terms of exasperating intimacy with his companion. In the doorway Mrs. Jasper Scrubb balled her hands into two hard fists and soliloquized:

“I knowed it! Jasper’n that wuthless biggity Clematis Creech! Reckon they ain’t no man never been bohn which could keep away fum a good-lookin’ widder.”

Jasper did not appear exactly happy, but on the other hand his well-modeled face expressed no enormous degree of misery as he gazed into the eyes of Mrs. Clematis Creech, cook for the household in which Jasper chauffeured and his bride nursed. If Clematis had been treated a

trifle liberally in all of the three known dimensions it was more than atoned for by the fact that curves had been placed where curves belonged, and the contour of her handsome face was punctured by a single fascinating dimple. Each of her physical perfections became more acute in the spotlight of Mrs. Scrubb's jealous gaze. Margerine's impulse was to break in upon the conference. Words from the lips of her husband halted her and she stood eavesdropping in petrified horror.

"How much money you desires?" queried Mr. Jasper Scrubb of Mrs. Clematis Creech.

Mrs. Creech sniffed.

"You knows ve'y well how much I wants, Jasper Scrubb."

"I ain't on'y got—"

"How much you is got I gits it. Ev'y copper."

Jasper ran a reluctant hand into his trousers pocket. He extracted therefrom a thin roll of disconsolate bills. These he handed over to Clematis. She counted the collection swiftly and raised level eyes to his.

"'Tain't on'y six dollars," she accused.

"Tha's all what I is got."

"How I knows that?"

"I gives you my word an' honor."

"I p'efers cash."

“But Clematis, is you rememberin’ I is got a wife, or ain’t you?”

Clematis turned loose an expressive shrug.

“I ain’t studyin’ ’bout no wives.”

“But I is. An’ if’n she ever knowed ’bout I an’ you—”

“You is gittin’ mighty s’lisitoodinous ’bout Margerine all of a suddint.”

“Well,” flared Jasper, “if’n a man cain’t show s’lisitood fo’ his own wife, whose wife c’n he show it fo’?”

“That aint botherin’ me, Jasper Scrubb. You owes me money. I advises that you pays it soon if’n you has wishes to remain happy with the wife you is ma’ied to!”

“But, Clematis—”

“What I is had to say I is said it. If’n you is got any fu’ther words to remahk kin’ly remember that money talks.”

“Ain’t you gwine tell me—”

“Ain’t gwine tell you nothin’ mo’. I is th’oo!”

Clematis turned and flung out of the room, leaving a doleful Jasper staring mournfully after her. He was a perfect picture of misery unadorned. But at that he was jubilant by comparison with his pretty young wife, who softly closed the door connecting breakfast room and kitchen and slowly and heavily made her way to

the front of the house and thence to the empty guest room, where she slumped into a rocking chair.

From the day of Clematis Creech's advent to the Kohler home Margerine had known apprehension. Apprehension had changed to suspicion and now suspicion had crystallized into certainty. And Margerine had been so happy!

Margerine Scrubb—née Jonas—had been a rare matrimonial prize. She had an air—there was no denying that. She could wear a bungalow apron and appear modish. And during her reign she had bestowed her favors upon a multitude of eager suitors with discouraging impartiality. Then Jasper Scrubb appeared.

Jasper Scrubb drifted into Birmingham from Montgomery. Margerine was formally introduced to him at an ice-cream festival given under the auspices and for the benefit of The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise. They had shaken hands, gazed into each other's eyes, heaved chorused sighs, eaten two plates of ice cream together—and mutually fallen. The passion of Héloïse for Abelard was pale and languid by comparison with that lavished by the hitherto impregnable Margerine upon Jasper Scrubb. And Jasper returned her devotion with compound interest. Within forty-eight hours of their introduction he was swearing violently

that she was the first and only love of his life. She had snuggled close.

“Does you really mean that, Jasper?”

“May ace deuce be the best I ever th’ows if’n ’tain’t so, darlin’!”

“Hones’ an’ true?”

“Hones’ an’ true! Crost my heart an’ hope to bust!”

“O-o-oh! That sho’ly soun’s fine to yo’ li’l’ Margerine, honey, ’cause’n I soht of feels that if’n I wa’n’t the fust woman in yo’ life I an’ you coul’n’t never be happy together.”

“If me ever havin’ loved another woman,” lied Jasper glibly, “is the on’y thing you is worryin’ yo’ pretty haid ’bout, then it’s plumb sho’ we is gwine to be the happies’ ma’ied couple which ever was.”

And so they were married—shortly thereafter. Followed a honeymoon trip to Nashville during which the young couple found themselves fairly paralyzed with happiness. They returned to Birmingham and Jasper to his job as chauffeur in the household of the wealthy Ethan Kohler.

Within a week they concurred in a resolution that the daily separation was unbearable. Whereupon Jasper got busy with his employer. Jasper fairly oozed arguments and the upshot of the business was that Margerine was em-

ployed as nurse to the two Kohler children, while she and Jasper were given the servants' room in the basement of the handsome Highland Avenue home. Their beatitude was incomparable, and Margerine excelled herself in her eagerness to make good on the job that she might remain with her husband.

Before her marriage Margerine had never shown any great passion for daily labor. Not that she was opposed to work as such, but she preferred to see someone else undertaking it. But the delighted Mrs. Kohler found her a paragon, and the matrimonial bark of the dusky couple floated placidly, serenely, until Clematis arrived.

Clematis Creech succeeded a cook whose allurements had been culinary rather than pulchritudinous. She was from Montgomery, where she had worked in a single establishment for two years, and she arrived armed with references superlative. And upon her arrival the leering face of trouble poked itself into the domestic Elysium of Jasper and Margerine Scrubb and the bride quaffed her first draft from the cup of misery.

Within a week it was obvious that there was something between her adored husband and the sturdy, rather coarsely handsome cook from Montgomery. At every mention of Clematis'

name Jasper ducked. At such times, he appeared more than a mite apprehensive. Yet it was very plain that he was closeted with Clematis for private conversations on every opportunity that presented itself. Margerine couldn't understand it and she was too sensible a bride to question direct. So she nursed her unhappiness and watched, and listened, and now at last she had seen and heard. She had seen and heard too much for comfort, and yet not enough for satisfaction. Her suspicion that there was a strictly sub-rosa affair between Jasper and Clematis was proved beyond peradventure. There was the damning evidence of the six dollars which he timidly tendered the Amazonian cook and which she accepted and scoffed at. It meant something—something terrible—and yet—

What? What could it mean? Had not Jasper sworn to her that she was the first woman in his life? True, she reflected bitterly, he had taken no oaths that she would be the last, but Margerine was more than a little suspicious that Clematis figured prominently in that past of Jasper's which the guilelessness of his face had caused her never to question. Eventually she made her way to the pretty little basement room which she shared with her husband. She flung herself on the bed and abandoned herself to an

orgy of wild weeping. From that she emerged refreshed and calculating. And at that inopportune moment Jasper entered. Contrary to custom she did not throw herself into his arms for a series of long and ardent kisses. In fact, she evaded his outstretched hands and backed behind the little table at the foot of the bed. Across his colorado-maduro-complexioned face there came an expression of pained surprise.

“Wha’s the matter, sweetness?”

“Nothin’.”

“You ain’t kissed me ontill yet.”

“Ain’t I?”

“No, you ain’t.”

“I didn’t notice I hadn’t.”

Jasper’s noble brow creased in a frown. He knew Margerine sufficiently well to understand that she had noticed. It was therefore obvious that something was wrong and that that something concerned himself and his domestic relations.

“You ain’t feelin’ sick, is you, honey?”

“Ain’t never felt no better in my life.”

“Then why—”

Margerine was growing exceedingly peeved in the face of his attitude of pained innocence. Her voice grew a bit chilly.

“Jasper?”

“Yes, sweetness?”

“How much is six fum two?”

He scratched his head.

“Six fum two?” he echoed blankly.

“Tha’s what I said.”

“Six fum—oh, you means two fum six!”

“I means what I said—six fum two is how much?”

He shook his head in dire puzzlement.

“They ain’t no such of a thing, Margerine.”

“Yes, they is.”

“Lis’en heah, sweetness—what you is talkin’ is foolishment.”

Margerine stared hard at her husband. His frank, almost boyish face gave the lie to the guile which she knew lurked in his heart.

“I means,” she remarked coldly, “six dollars fum two dollars leaves how much?”

The light of understanding began to penetrate the cranium of Mr. Jasper Scrubb. He commenced to become conscious of the fact that she had come into possession of some very embarrassing information. He sparred desperately for time—and air.

“Now, honey,” he chided, “how come you to go botherin’ yo’ haid bouten ’rithmetic?”

“Ain’t studyin’ ’bout no ’rithmetic,” she retorted frigidly.

He conscripted a smile and plastered it across his face with an effect rather ghastly. "Then it's all right?"

"Wha's all right?"

"Bouten that thing you was astin' me?"

"What thing?"

"'Bout two fum six leaves how many?"

"Six fum two," she corrected. "Las' time I seen you you ain't had but two dollars lef' in yo' pockets, but you is done gone an' spent six sence then. Now I asts how much is you got lef'?"

"Honey—"

"How much?"

"You is so s'picious."

"S'picious I is," she flamed. "Fac' is s'picious of you is 'bout the on'y things I ain't got nothin' else but."

She paused and glared. The righteous wrath was gathering steam within her bridal bosom and threatening to blow off the safety. And finally it did. 🌸

"'Tain't that I objec's to yo' makin' fumadiddles with other wimmin, but it does soht of seem to me that yo'd be mo' of a gen'leman than to pick out a big rawboned hussy what wuks right heah where yo' wife does."

Jasper was as near pale as nature permitted. He gasped, strangled, and finally, "I—I—ain't picked her out."

"No-o?"

"No'm. Honest. She went an' puck me out."

"Cain't say I admires her taste," she flamed. "Not none whichsoever. An' it don' tell me nothin' bouten that six dollars which you ain't had an' yit which you give to her."

An idea came to Jasper. Perhaps she was bluffing. "How comes you to know I give her six dollars?"

"I seen you when you done it!"

He came closer to her. His original intention was based on sound strategy. He knew that she cared for him very deeply and he planned to in-fold her in his arms and lull her suspicions against the husbandly breast. But a certain gleam in her eyes warned him against the move. He paused suddenly and folded his arms across a narrow chest. Immediately thereafter he assumed an expression of one whose escutcheon has been ruthlessly blotted. "I is s'prised at you, Margerine."

"Cain't say I ain't s'prised at you, Mistuh Scrubb."

"Havin' s'picious bouten me thisaway."

"Does you think you ma'ied a loonytic? Ain't I done saw—"

"Co'se you is. I wa'n't tryin' to conceal nothin' fum you, was I? I asts you that." He

gazed triumphantly upon her. "You ain't even ast me what explination I is got to make."

"Humph! You is got to make one all right. What is it?"

Jasper came to earth with a thump. He had started blithely off, got going good and didn't see whither he was bound. Now he was stalled.

"What is which?"

"Yo' explination bouten how come you to make monkeyshines with Clematis Creech ever sence she done come heah, an' give her six dollars a li'l' while ago. What you is got to say 'bout all of that?"

Jasper thought with record-breaking speed. And finally he made a last despairing effort to gain time.

"Says which?"

"What is you got to say bouten it, Mistuh Scrubb?"

Jasper opened his mouth, closed it again, opened it once more and finally gasped forth his domestic swan song.

"Nothin'!"

Margerine said the same thing and she said it eloquently. Jasper, miserable, pleaded with her. He maintained with praiseworthy intensity that things were not as they seemed and that some day she would understand. Margerine turned her back upon him and crossed to

a white dressing table which he had presented to her some time since and commenced making up her face with Madame Scarrow's Lavender-Brown Complexion Cream and Guaranteed Beautifier. Jasper might as well have been pleading with the enameled bedstead for all the response that came his way. And finally—principally because there was nothing else for him to do—he gave it up as a bad job, whirled, clapped the military chauffeur's cap violently on the back of his head and dashed madly for the kitchen upstairs.

Mrs. Clematis Creech had departed. The housemaid knew where she lived—she gave Jasper a North Twenty-fifth Street address. Jasper made his exit. And no sooner had he whisked himself away than Mrs. Margerine Scrubb entered the kitchen and questioned the unsuspecting maid.

“Jasper gone?”

“Yeh.”

“Where to?”

“I dunno. He ast me did I know where Clematis lived?”

“What did you tell him?”

“I tol' him yes.”

“You knows the house number?”

The maid gave it cheerfully. Margerine hustled to her room, donned a natty little tam and

arrived at the front of the house just in time to see Jasper at the wheel of his employer's car streaking it down Highland Avenue at an ordinance-breaking speed. Clematis' afternoon off, and Jasper obviously gone to call upon her. The fact that Mr. Scrubb had not known her address mattered little to Mrs. Scrubb. What need for that when Clematis' job brought her into inevitable daily contact with the chauffeur?

Margerine got busy. She stopped a passing Lakeview car and traveled townward, alighting at Second Avenue. She walked eastward toward Twenty-fifth Street. Meanwhile Jasper had located Mrs. Creech's number. He parked his car against the curb one block away and started for the house. A four-year-old girl of Afro-American extraction toddled out onto the sidewalk and ran into the street. A truck veered sharply to one side, narrowly missing the child. Jasper clutched violently at the youngster and deposited her safely on the curb. The incident left him a trifle shaky. He brushed a speck of dust from his immaculate uniform and started toward the front door of the Creech home. As he set foot on the nethermost step the figure of Mrs. Clematis Creech bulked in the frame of the doorway and her eyes focused on the now loudly crying little girl near the curb. Jasper explained the incident. Clematis chuckled.

“If that don’ beat all quincidence.”

“What?”

“Yo’ savin’ of li’l’ Clematis thataway.”

Jasper was puzzled. He eyed the child with renewed interest.

“Li’l’ Clematis?”

“Tha’s which.”

Jasper was dumfounded. He had visioned situations similar to this in the movies, but even with that precedent to assist him he was at a loss as to how to handle himself.

“Geemanety!” he quavered. “You ain’t standin’ up there an’ tellin’ that’s my own chile, is you?”

Clematis snickered. “Reckon I is. Yours an’ mine. Ain’t you gwine kiss her?”

Jasper placed a shaking hand on the head of his daughter.

“Jiminy tripe!” he breathed. He stooped and awkwardly kissed the little girl, who rewarded him with a gaze of pained surprise. He looked up at the woman. “Ain’t she growed?”

“They mos’ usuanly does,” came the answer. “Li’l’ Clematis takes after her ma thataway—thank goodness!”

The situation was very embarrassing. Jasper was eager to end the scene. He nodded toward the open doorway.

“Is you busy?”

“Ain’t never busy on my afternoon off. Ain’t got nothin’ to do on’y the fambly washin’. What you want?”

“I wants to make talk with you on a ginuwinely ’pawtant matter.”

“’Bout that money you owes me?”

“Which money?” innocently.

“My weekly alimony. Also fo’ li’l’ Clematis an’—”

Jasper extended a restraining hand.

“Now lis’en at what I is got to say, Clematis. I is a ma’ied man—”

“That ain’t no new spe’ience fo’ you, Jasper Scrubb.”

“A ma’ied man, an’ I is got feenancial ’sponsibilities an’—”

Clematis struck an attitude of injured pride. There was more than a hint of anger reflected in her very positive face.

“Feenancial ’sponsibilities!” she scoffed. “Huh! What you reckon I is got? Now you lis’en at me, Jasper Scrubb, an’ you had better lis’en tho’ough, ’cause I ain’t got no min’ to repeat myse’f over an’ over again.”

She bent her body slightly at the waist and transfixed him with a glare of exceeding balefulness.

“Five yeahs ago you went an ma’ied me an’

one yeah later li'l' Clematis been bohn. Then we had a few qua'ls an'—"

Jasper became sadly reminiscent.

"We didn't have no qua'ls, Clematis. You had 'em, an' you beat me up sumthin' scand'lous."

"Be that which way it might," she retorted, "if'n a man cain't 'fend hisse'f again' his wife, then he dese'ves to be beat up. Anyway, you got yo' divohce fum me on the groun's of croolty."

"You is all twisted," responded Jasper sadly. "You is the one sued me fo' divohce on them groun's. But it didn't fool that jedge none. He looked at you an' he looked at me. He knowed!"

"He give me alimony," said Clematis proudly. "Five dollars a week."

Jasper grimaced.

"Talkin' 'bout onpleasant things is the fond-es' thing you is of. I s'pose nex' you is gwine be rubbin' it in that he give me the cusstidy of li'l' Clematis an' ever sence then I is had to pay you two dollars a week to take care of her. I s'pose that, huh?"

"You ain't been payin' it, Jasper. Tha's how come all the trouble to staht."

"Humph!" The words brought to Jasper realization of the fact that his mission to the

home of his former wife had a definite object.

"That brings on mo' talk."

"Says which?"

"You is got to quit yo' job up to the Kohlers' house."

Clematis' eyes narrowed.

"Who is you, cullud man, you should be tellin' me what I is got to do?"

Jasper realized his tactical blunder. He hedged violently.

"I ain't tellin' you what you is must got to do," he explained meticulously. "I is astin' you what you ought to got to do."

"Tha's diff'ent. Now splain a li'l'. You always was a champeen splainer."

Mr. Scrubb cleared his throat.

"It's soht of thisaway," said he. "When I met up with Margerine I soht of tol' her that she was the fust woman I ever did love. I done it soht of easy an' nachel, like a man does them things an' never did spec' how much trouble I was gittin' into. She come right back to me an' wan'ed to know was I tellin' her the truth, an' I 'lowed that I was, an' she kept on 'sistin' bouten it so much that fin'ly I was in over my haid. I had tol' her so much lies 'bout how I never knowed they was sech a thing as a woman on earth until I met her that if'n I'd of mentioned that I'd once been ma'ied an' had a baby

she would of busted up our 'gagement quick."

He paused and waited for the helpful comment. Clematis' sole contribution was rather abstract. "You always was a pow'ful loose liar, Jasper."

Jasper plead guilty in rather cheerless fashion.

"I sho' lied one time too many right there. But I never thought I was gwine git caught—you wukkin' down in Mon'gom'ry an' havin' a job which was plumb stiddy. Then bango! You ups an' comes to Bummin'ham an' takes that cookin' job out to the Kohlers."

Clematis shrugged.

"I knowed you, Jasper, an' I been keepin' in touch. I knowed you was ma'ied an' wukkin' fo' Mr. Kohler. An' I sho'ly knowed that the five dollars a week alimony an' the two dollars mo' you was payin' me fo' takin' care of the chile which the co'ts done gíve you the custiddy of was comin' mo' infrequenter than usual. An' I soht of thunk that mebbby my bein' right heah on the job would keep you fum fo'gittin'."

"That was a swell think you thunk, Clematis," he answered lugubriously.

"I reckon I ain't such a wuss thinker. An' when I got heah I picked up a'quaintance with the cook what was wukkin' to the Kohlers an' tha's how come I to know when she was gwine

quit. An' after all that trouble I ain't gwine give up the job. They is pow'ful fine white folks to wuk fo'."

"I ain't studyin' 'bout is they fine white folks to wuk fo', Clematis. What wo'ies me is the cullud folks which is wukkin' fo' 'em."

"Well, I ain't caused you no trouble yet, is I?"

"Huh! Not no mo'n what the good Lawd caused the 'Gypcheens when he let the Red Sea git 'em all damp."

"How come that?"

"Does you reckon Margerine is a fool?"

"I ain't knowed her ve'y long."

"Well, she ain't. N'r neither blind. An' she is been gittin' s'piciouser an' s'piciouser ever sence you got there an' I an' you is been havin' li'l' private talks. An' fin'ly to-day she went out an' put a cap on the climax when she seen me slip you them six dollars. Y'see, Clematis—it's thisaway: With yo' alimony an' what I pays yo' fo' takin' care of the baby thutty dollars is cut fum my sal'ry ev'y month, and so's Margerine woul'n't never know I thought of the scheme of tellin' her that I was gittin' sevumty dollars a month 'stid of the hund'ed dollars which I is rilly gittin'. To-day she knowed I on'y was jue to have two dollars in my pocket an' she seen me give you six. She

di'n't know where that other fo' come fum, which was almost as wuss as seein' me give it to another woman when I ain't on'y been ma'ied to her fo' a few months. Things like that soht of don' look right."

Clematis concurred. And then: "But yo' dimestic qua'ls is yo' own, Jasper. I ain't studyin' bouten them."

"You ain't want to bust up this ma'iage like you busted up our own, is you?"

"Humph! Reckon it would be soht of hahd on you to have to pay two alimonies, woul'n't it?"

"That ain't it," he pleaded miserably. "Fac' is, Clematis, I really loves this wife I is got now."

"Oh, you does, does you? Well, I is tellin' you this, Mistuh Jasper Scrubb: Mebbe she is yo' wife now, but I is the mother of yo' chile an' I is jue me from you seven dollars a week which I inten's to git. An' if'n it ain't fo'th-comin' prompt an' reg'lar, then I is gwine know the reason how come. If'n you pays it I ain't gwine make no trouble, but if'n you don't—well, knowin' Margerine like'n to what I does an' 'bout yo' lies to her 'bout she is the fust woman you ever loved all I is sayin', Mistuh Scrubb, is that yo'd better git that money reg'lar an' prompt—an' complete!"

“Ain’t you got no heart?”

“No,” snapped Clematis coldly. “I is got a pocketbook.”

Jasper started for the door. He knew Clematis of old and realized when to let well enough alone. He was worried and nervous, but not half so worried and nervous as he would have been had he known that for the past fifteen minutes Mrs. Margerine Scrubb had been standing in the alley which bounded Clematis’ home on the north; standing in the alley with her back to the street and her ears strained for any chance word that might be thrown her way. Thus far Margerine had heard nothing. But now her patience was rewarded in full measure.

Clematis posed on the porch as Jasper started for the gate. On the sidewalk their mutual child was playing earnestly with a choo-choo train fashioned of shoe boxes held together by bits of string. Not noticing the little girl, Jasper started up the street. Clematis’ voice cut harshly through the clear spring air, carrying not only to the ears of Jasper but also to the eavesdropping ones of the wife in the alley.

“Ain’t you gwine to make talk with her at all?”

Jasper turned.

“Says which?”

"Ain't you even gwine speak to yo' own chile?"

Jasper placed an embarrassed hand on the head of little Clematis.

"Hello, Clematis."

The child giggled delightedly. Jasper produced a nickel, which he pressed into her palm. He rounded off the conversation relievedly.

"G'-by, Clematis."

From the porch came the mother's voice.

"Say 'Good-by, daddy.' "

Obediently came the echo, "By-by, daddy."

Jasper vamped! He reached the corner before anything else happened. But what happened then gave him cause for profound thought and more than a little apprehension. A very large and exceedingly dusky gentleman with a bullet head and enormous muscular, apelike arms detached himself from the shadow of a large oak tree near the spot where Jasper had parked his car.

"Cullud man!"

Jasper halted.

"Huh?"

"I wants a word with you."

Jasper took in the forbidding aspect of the other and refused to give unanimity to the desire.

"Me?"

“Uh-huh, you. Is you been to see Clematis?”

“Reckon so.”

“I reckons so also. Now I is tellin’ you, shrimp, that I woul’n’t go hangin’ roun’ Clematis any mo’n you hafter if’n I was you—or even less’n that.”

Jasper bobbed his head in agreement.

“Yassuh—yassuh, you sho’ly is tootin’ now! You sho’ly is doin’ that ve’y same thing!”

The large black man balled his hamlike fists significantly.

“Remember, I is wa’ned you.”

“You sho’ly has—yassuh, you is suttin’ly done that.” And then the dawning of a thought came to Jasper. He fired a question. “You is pusson’ly int’rusted in Clematis?”

The stranger answered with dignity.

“I is—cumsid’rable.”

Jasper leaped into the car and shot down the street. The big man strolled slowly and thoughtfully toward the house where Clematis and her offspring resided. And at the same time a teary, miserable Margerine Scrubb reached the upper end of the alley in which she had been standing and strolled aimlessly in the general direction of Norwood while giving herself over to a siege of bitter thought. She had trailed Jasper hoping against hope that she

would uncover some circumstance which might extenuate his strange actions in connection with Clematis Creech. Instead of doing that she had stumbled upon evidence doubly damning and she faced a future inordinately gloomy.

Margerine loved her husband. She couldn't help that any more than she could help loving her new royal-purple coat suit or her newest jazz record. The fact that he was a philanderer and had allowed a spectral past to become a menacing present did not lessen her passion for him, however much it may have seasoned that passion with deep and righteous anger. For Margerine was angry as only young and pure and betrayed love can be angry. Blessed with the liberal biceps of Clematis, she would have returned home and laid in wait for the rather diminutive Jasper. She even considered it seriously for a few moments and decided that such a course would constitute a tactical blunder. A wife, she realized, must never clash physically with her husband unless assured that she will be returned victor.

"Ain't gwine beat him up," she decided. " 'Tain't ladylike—an' besides I ain't big enough."

She felt, however, that she could not sit back idly and let the disgraceful affair run its course. By some stretch of the imagination she

fancied that she might have overlooked the affair with Clematis. Clematis was large and violent and time would have righted matters there. But a child! Margerine felt herself blushing for her adored and wicked husband. And since she had to do something, confide in someone, her thoughts turned inevitably toward Evans Chew, colored attorney at law par excellence and by virtue of family her second cousin.

Lawyer Chew was the haven of refuge for the colored brethren and sistern of Birmingham who had or expected troubles. He knew his law, and what was more to the point he knew folks. He was the world's champion adjuster, and if in adjusting he managed to find a few extra dollars floating in the river of content which he created he was not to be begrudged the reward.

She reached the Penny Prudential Bank Building and left the elevator at the seventh floor. The very-high-yaller stenographer admitted her without question to the inner sanctum. Lawyer Chew looked up in surprise at the unannounced entrance. Then he rose.

“Margerine!”

Something akin to a sob was torn from her.

“Oh, Cousin Evans, Ise so mis’able!”

“Mis’able?”

He stood before her, a Colossus of comfort; a magnificent light-brown being of immaculate tailoring, unassailable dignity, horn-rimmed spectacles and incomparable poise. She burst into tears and he gathered her to his bosom.

"There, there, Margerine! If'n they's one man in this heah known and civilized world which can dissolve you from the trouble you is in that man is yo' Cousin Evans Chew. Tell it to me, Margarine—tell me all 'bout it."

Margerine told him. She told him fully, graphically and tearfully. And as she talked she discovered that recountal of Jasper's perfidy caused her rancor against that liveried individual to grow alarmingly. There wasn't a doubt of it—Jasper had treated her scurvily. 'Twa'n't no way fo' no husban' to ac'—tha's what. She sho' was gwine git even with him if'n it took all her life an' his las' dollar.

Lawyer Chew listened attentively and comforted in general terms. He promised to see that matters were properly adjusted and that tranquillity would once more visit the little room in the basement of Ethan Kohler's home.

"An' case'n he jes' nachelly ain't no good—"

"What then, Cousin Evans?"

Evans Chew drummed on the mahogany-finish desk.

“The laws an’ stachutes of this gran’, noble an’ sov’ eign state of Alabama as made an’ pre- vided says an’ maintains that when a man an’ woman is ma’ied an’ said man as he’inbefo’ mentioned is mixed up an’ entangled with a tershum quid they is a way of undoing that error which the law has made in uniting them in the holy bonds of wedlock an’ matrimony, an’—”

“D’vohce, you means, Cousin Evans— d’vohce?”

“Tha’s which.”

“O-o-o-oh!” she wailed. “Not never that! I woul’n’t d’vohce Jasper if’n he was the father of ev’y cullud chile in Bummin’ham!”

Five minutes later Margerine left Evans Chew’s office. The elevator rose to the seventh floor. The door of the cage opened.

“Comin’ out,” droned the elevator boy, but Margerine did not hear. The passenger col- lided sharply with her and they dropped back and stared into each other’s eyes.

“Jasper!”

“Margerine!”

“Where you is goin’?”

“Where you is been?”

Suddenly she remembered. Her head went back proudly. She swept past him.

“I ain’t got no time to waste with sech trash as you, Mistuh Scrubb.”

The elevator dropped. So did Jasper’s lower jaw. He was as happy as a California orange grove in a killing frost. And it never occurred to him that Margerine had been to visit Lawyer Chew, and even if he had thought of it the chances are that the possibility of his having been mixed up in her visit would never have occurred to him.

He reached the ground-glass door bearing in gold letters the inscription:

LAWYER EVANS CHEW

ATTORNEY & COUNSELOR AT LAW

PRACTICE IN ALL COURTS

ACCOUNTS CHEERFULLY HANDLED

ENTRANCE

COME IN

The stenographer announced that Lawyer Chew was busy and forced the impatient visitor to wait fifteen minutes. Then she ushered him in. At first the attorney and counselor failed to notice Jasper. He was apparently absorbed in a musty treatise on negotiable instruments. Finally he looked up and started with well-simulated surprise.

“Jasper Scrubb!”

“Yassuh, Lawyer Chew. Ise he.”

“So you is—so you is. Have a seat. You—er—a wishes to see me?”

“Uh-huh. I does that, Lawyer Chew. I sho’ly does. Tha’s why I come heah.”

“Well?”

“Answer me one question fust on, Lawyer Chew. If’n I comes to you prefessionally an’ tells you some secrits which concerns my domestic affairs between Margerine an’ myself, an’ pays you a fee accordin’—ain’t you boun’ not to tell nobody what I tells you, even Margerine?”

Chew nodded.

“You has stated the ethics of the situation tersely an’ correc’ly, Jasper. When I accep’s a fee fum you you becomes my client an’ that which transposes between you an’ I is as sacred as the innermos’ workin’s of a lodge. Same bein’ as modulated an’ previded in Section 2978 of the stachutory code an’ laws of the state of Alabama.”

Jasper rubbed his hands together and broke into a smile.

“Tha’s puffec’ly swell. Now—”

“That condition an’ status,” hinted the attorney, “is established when I has accepted a retainer fum you.”

“How much?” faltered Jasper.

“How much is you got?”

“Ten bits. But”—quickly, as he saw an expression of disgust cross the face of the man of legal learning—“I c’n draw a writin’ an’ pay you cash when I gits it.”

That formality attended to, Jasper started explaining.

Then he went on explaining. And he only finished explaining when Lawyer Chew stopped him.

“So that’s how come things is like they is, Lawyer Chew. You know Margerine well as I does—a’most; an’ you knows that after all them lies I done tol’ her I cain’t jus’ up an’ in-fohm her I is got a wife an’ chile which she ain’t never heard about. I reckon that’d be too—too—soht of s’prisin’ foh her.”

“Hmm! Some wimmin gits a heap wuss s’prises than that sometimes, Jasper.”

“Mebbe so, but heap wuss fo’ other wimmin don’ make this less badder fo’ Margerine.”

“Tha’s cause you ain’t as familiar with leading cases like I is, Jasper. Now my advice to you is to go to Margerine an’ tell her ev’y-thing an’—”

“No!”

It was a vocal explosion.

“That don’ make no sense a tall, Lawyer Chew. I ain’t gwine tell her nothin’ an’ I is

come to you fo' yo' advice an' sence you is assepted a fee fum me you ain't 'lowed by ethics to tell her nothin' neither. I wants advice, but I don't want that kind of advice."

"You refuse to tell her the truth?"

"Tellin' yo' wife the truth bouten a thing like that, Lawyer Chew, is 'bout as sensible as walkin' into p'lice headquarters an' offerin' to shoot the desk sergeant two bits."

Lawyer Chew rose and rambled to the window, where he gazed down upon the traffic seethe of Eighteenth Street. Finally he turned.

"You is willin' to leave the handlin' of this heah case which I has under advisement to my own judicial discretion?"

"Yeh—providin' you don' tell Margerine I is been ma'ied an' had a chile."

"Hmm!" Chew stroked his chin reflectively. "They is a plan—"

"Tell which?"

"Well, if'n yo' fust wife was to git ma'ied ag'in—"

"No chance," gloomed Jasper. "They ain't nary man fool enough."

"Anyway," persisted Chew, "if'n she was to go an' git ma'ied ag'in the five dollars a week alimony which you is now by order of the co't, fo'ced to pay her would thereby cease an' tumminate ipso dixit, an'—"

Jasper's face lighted. He extended a restraining hand.

"Hol' on there, Lawyer Chew! Th'ow 'er into newchral fo' a li'l' minute. Does you mean to go an' tell me that if'n Clematis goes an' gits herse'f ma'ied to another man I ain't got to pay no' mo' alimony a tall never?"

"That was the substince of my 'loocidation, Jasper."

"An' you—you is thinkin' that if'n she was to be ma'ied an' I didn't have no mo' alimony to pay then it woul'n't be so hahd tellin' Margerine that I had done been ma'ied befo' with another woman?"

"Not sayin' that Margerine ain't lovin' you a heap, Jasper, but I knows wimmin an' I think she might stan' yo' havin' been ma'ied providin' they ain't no cash cumsideration hangin' over therefrom."

"I is got a two-dollar-a-week chile, Lawyer Chew."

"You cain't espec' to git off scot-free, Jasper. You is gwine be lucky if'n you gits off a tall. I assuahs you of that much. And so now—"

"Yeh?"

"All you is got to do is to git Clematis ma'ied to some other feller."

Jasper stared. His eyes opened slowly and his jaw dropped.

“‘Tha’s all?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Jes’ on’y that?”

“You said correc’ly.”

Jasper waxed a trifle sarcastic.

“An’ after I finishes with doin’ that I reckon you is prob’ly gwine advise me to invent a pair of loseless dice, ride a moto’cycle standin’ on my haid, borry thutty thousan’ dollars fum the Fus’ National Bank, git Truman an’ Orpha Chinnners to len’ me they baby fo’ a week or so an’—”

Lawyer Chew rose. He exuded outraged self-esteem.

“Brother Scrubb,” he said sonorously, “you fo’gits yo’s’e’f.”

Jasper shook his head violently.

“Nossuh, Lawyer Chew, it was you fo’got me. They ain’t no man—even a lawyer—got no right tellin’ no man he is got to git his wife ma’ied off to another feller.”

“I is siggested a silution fo’ the predicament which you is in,” returned the attorney icily. “When you is acted upon my advice I is willin’ to have another confe’ence with you. Until then”—he crossed to the door and held it open significantly—“until then, Jasper, I

is a mos' exceedin'ly busy man. Good day."

Jasper good day'd. There was nothing else for him to do. He rambled disconsolately down the street and dropped into Bud Peaglar's Barbecue Lunch Room and Billiard Parlor, where he ignored the cheerful invitations to try his luck at Kelly pool. In a far corner he seated himself to reflect upon the misery of the present and the agonies of the immediate future. He thought the matter over from every possible angle and eventually separated the wheat of certainty from the chaff of conjecture. He found these facts registered on the certainty side of the ledger:

First, he could fool Margerine some of the time but not all of the time. In the near future she must be told the truth, principally because she already knew so much that untruths would prove futile. Second, when Margerine should learn that his affair with Clematis was very much of the past and the love element completely extinct she would probably forgive readily, a defunct past wife being less confounding than a living lady friend. Third, Margerine believed that his salary was seventy dollars a month.

If he could get Clematis married off to some unsuspecting unfortunate he would virtually come into twenty dollars a month, which might

be handed over bodily to Margerine. And Margerine needed many articles of clothing which twenty additional dollars each month would help to purchase. Fourth, a man had to be found who was willing to take a chance on Clematis, as with Clematis remaining a grass widow every possible solution fell flat.

Simple—absurdly simple—provided — Jasper's eyes roamed idly through the fetid pool room vaguely visioning the gaudy-shirted figures limned in the fog of cigarette smoke. His eye struck a huge frame bent tensely over a table, his ear sensed a familiar and disquieting voice:

“Better roll in, ol’ eight rock, better roll in. They’s fo’ bits up on you, eight rock—fo’ bits. Daddo! Done it! Pay me fellers—fo’ bits each. Th’ee dollars on the eight rock.”

Jasper fidgeted. Somewhere—somehow—suddenly he slapped a well-manicured hand against a neatly trousered knee.

“Tha’s the bird ast me had I been to see Clematis!”

He rose and verified his suspicion. He yearned and he trembled. The Gargantuan stranger had admitted that he was interested in Clematis and acted toward Jasper as though he was not overly pleased with that gentleman’s visit to the domicile of the lady. It was too

good an opportunity to pass up, and yet—

Jasper was apprehensive. One gentle buffet of that big hand and Jasper saw himself floating down the River Lethe. But Jasper was desperate. He had not yet seen Margerine and he sensed that the worst was yet to come. How bad that worst was going to be even Jasper in his wildest imaginings could not conceive, for he was blissfully unaware of the fact that Margerine had witnessed his farewell to his child. It was not until thirty minutes later, after the eight-ball game had been concluded, that Jasper steeled his nerve to the point of addressing the huge thundery stranger. And even when he did so there was a pronounced quaver in his voice.

“Stranger?”

“Huh?”

“My name’s Jasper Scrubb.”

“I don’ give a cuss what yo’ name is.”

“I wan’s to make talk with you fo’ a minute.”

The big fellow paused and surveyed Jasper carefully. Then a light of recognition flashed in his eye and Jasper felt himself wilt.

“You?”

“Uh-uh-huh!”

“What about?”

“Tha-tha’s what I wan’s to talk over.”

“What?”

“That.”

“Humph!” The stranger decided to take a chance. “C’mon. Buy me a seegar.”

Jasper purchased twin weeds. He donated both to the sable Goliath. Then he broached the subject in an exceedingly tactful way. Said he: “You remembers Clematis?”

The stranger frowned forbiddingly.

“Lis’en heah, cullud boy—”

“Well,” hastily, “she is pesterin’ the life outen me.”

The other man squirmed in his chair and there was something menacing in the squirm.

“Says which?”

“She won’t lemme ’lone. I is jes’ been ma’ied an’ my wife nurses where I chauffeurs. Clematis is cook there an’ my wife is jealous of her.”

“Is you tellin’ me,” intoned the other, “that they is sumthin’ between Clematis an’ you?”

“Wiggilin’ gol’fish, no! Not now an’ they never ain’t gwine be. Tha’s what I wants to see you ’bout. An’ I asts you straight out a question. Is you int’rusted in Clematis?”

“I is.”

“How much?”

“That depen’s.”

“On which?”

“Why you wan’s to know?”

They were getting along famously and Jasper took the plunge. He spoke passionately and forcefully. He decided unanimously that it was better for all concerned that he keep the fact of his former marriage to Clematis a secret—natural caution. How'd he know this big chap wouldn't use it as an instrument of blackmail? Such knowledge was best kept to oneself. Knowledge is power and Jasper desired a hundred per cent interest in that particular power plant.

What he told his square-jawed acquaintance was that Clematis was a nice lady, a mos' exceedingly ve'y nice lady and one who would make some largely muscled man a wonderful wife. Also, that his own wife, Margerine, was almost as nice a girl, but Margerine was of a jealous disposition. Of course, he explained, there were no grounds for Margerine's jealousy of Clematis and himself—not nary one. Nossuh, not even a li'l' piece of one single groun'.

“But, then, you know, they ain't no tellin' why wimmin gits jealous or reasonin' with 'em sensible when they does. They is either jealous or they ain't, an' when they is hell busts loose.”

It seemed, according to Jasper's yarn, that the infernal regions had busted and were continuing to bust.

“But,” he finished, “if’n Clematis was to up an’ ma’y some nice feller like’n to what you is then Margerine would know that her bein’ in love with another feller she wa’n’t wastin’ no time on me. Come that, an’ Margerine would be ’shamed she s’picioned us an’ I an’ her would be happy again.”

He found his new friend eying him peculiarly as he paused for breath. Said that gentleman: “You desiahs that I make ma’iage with Clematis?”

Jasper felt no enmity.

“W-e-ll, that ain’t ’zac’ly necessary.”

“Then what does you want?”

“If’n you’d just love her a li’l’ bit. Soht of co’t her an’ make Margerine think you was in love with her an’ she was in love with you. Co’s’e if’n you likes Clematis a’ready—”

“I does—soht of. An’ if’n I was to co’t her so’s Margerine could see I was doin’ same an’ then fin’ly marry her—well, cullud man, I asts you fair an’ square, how much is it wuth to you?”

“That depen’s. How does you wish to handle it—by the week or the job?”

Careful thought, and then, “I’ll take the job. How much is you willin’ to pay?”

“Mmm! S’posin’ we say fifteen dollars cash

when you ma'ies Clematis, providin' you does plenty of good co'tin'."

Came a violent haw-haw in answer.

"You talks like a ten-cent sto', li'l' speck. Fifty dollars is mo' like'n to my price."

"Twen'y?"

"Fo'ty-five."

"Cain't do it. Thutty?"

"Nope. Fo'ty."

"Nossuh! Thutty-five is my top limit. Ain't gwine pay a cent mo'n that—nary copper."

The giant reflected. Thirty-five was ten more than he had expected.

"Cash?" he queried.

"Cash money the day you ma'ies her."

Out came an ebony hand.

"Done with you! Thutty-five it is, but they ain't a cent profit in it at that price."

"They is lots of things," returned Jasper philosophically, "which ain't profitable but which is pow'ful nice jes' the same. Now so's we'll have this heah thing all straight—what yo' name is?"

"Cephus Jefferson."

"When does you begin to commence co'tin', Brother Jefferson?"

Cephus glanced at the big clock on the wall of the pool room.

"They ain't no time like t'-night, is they?"

“Nossuh.”

Cephus rose and waved an insouciant hand.

“T’-night it is,” he said cheerily. “G’-by.”

“G’-by. I wishes you luck.” And under his breath Jasper added, “Bad luck!”

Jasper drove the roadster to his employer’s office. He reached there thirty minutes late and was berated accordingly. It did not add to his happiness. Arriving at the Kohler home, he put the car in the garage and descended to the basement room he shared with Margerine. Jasper was trembling. But he knew that he had to face the music sooner or later. Better sooner.

He turned the knob and pushed. The door remained as it was. Puzzled, he tried again. Then he knocked.

Came a choky voice from inside: “Who’s there?”

“It’s me, honey.”

“Who’s you?”

“It’s yo’ Jasper.”

A silence, and then: “I prefers not to entertain gen’lemen in my apahtment, Mistuh Scrubb. Tha’s final!”

Jasper spent the night on a bench in the cellar with a single blanket between himself and the night air. He slept fitfully and unhappily. In the morning his bones shrieked protest and Jasper fearing principally another night of the

same made heroic but futile efforts to pacify his wife. Margerine wouldn't conciliate. And what was even more conclusive proof of the fierceness of her anger, she would not talk. Jasper meditated. He meditated for the several days that dragged wearily after and as he meditated he watched. There wasn't a doubt of the fact that Cephus was working fast. More, Cephus reported progress. Chances were, he affirmed, that wedding bells would soon peal forth, as his intentions toward Clematis were not only honorable but sudden.

Jasper Scrubb had once been caught unprepared. Not so this time. He hastily collected a few very personal belongings and hiked to the loan man's office. He came away without the burden of personal property but with fifty-six dollars in cash, thirty-five dollars to pay Cephus for slinging a halter round his own neck and nine dollars still due Clematis. The balance was destined to be risked in moieties on the turns of the clicking ivories and the luck of Jackson Ramsay's Pool and Genuine Lottery. Hopes—always hopes.

Of course Jasper realized at the moment of abstracting the pawnable property from his room that Margerine would miss it. His object was therefore twofold and he stood to win either way. Should Margerine's indignation

master her rancor against him she would deign to hurl a word or two in his direction—a relief after the dry desert of talkless communion with which she had favored him in the immediate past. If her dignity still remained on top she would ignore him entirely and he would be fifty-six temporary dollars to the good and in a fair way toward the righting of his wrongful position, all of which would justify the tendering of an explanation with some hope of its success.

Between Clematis and Margerine there had arisen a hostile friendliness. Clematis knew what Margerine was thinking and resented it. But at the same time there was a quiet amusement in the knowledge that her skirts would eventually be cleared by explanation and that in the meanwhile she clutched all of the trumps in the strong and capable hand which had once lain in Jasper's during the recital of a marriage ceremony.

Margerine on her part had developed a venomous hatred for the large-boned female who had disrupted her domestic content. In the first place sight of Clematis was not at all flattering. Reviewing the situation impersonally Margerine failed to understand how even Jasper could have forsaken her ardent embraces for the too positive Clematis. Of course Clematis was a widow and widows are supposed to

know a thing or two denied the ordinary woman. But even that did not explain it all. Margerine spoke to Clematis—spoke frequently and sweetly. It would never do, reflected the bride, for anyone to suspect that there was aught of friction between the vulgar Clematis and the cousin of Lawyer Evans Chew over the husband of the latter.

Jasper anchored in the offing and watched the relationship existing between his present and past wife and marveled thereat. Meanwhile he sought the society of the mammoth Cephus Jefferson on every possible occasion and urged that gentleman to make haste with his courtship. Cephus promised.

And finally one week after the day upon which the trouble had started Cephus Jefferson communicated to Jasper the gladsome news that he was ready to go through with the ceremony. Jasper was dazzled with joy.

“Is you ast Clematis?”

“I sho’ly has. Does you think Ise ma’yin’ her without her premission?”

“They ain’t no tellin’ what a man is gwine do where wimmin is concerned at.”

“I ast her an’ she’s willin’. You c’n come along an’ be a witness.”

Jasper reneged. Never having mentioned to Cephus the fact that he was the former husband

of Clematis, he didn't relish an eleventh-hour disclosure. He was a trifle afraid that the sudden news might disconcert the prospective bridegroom of his ex-wife and result in a calling off of the nuptials. And yet Jasper wanted to be sure that the marriage was pulled off in due and legal form. An idea came to him and he put it in words.

"I ain't care pertickerly 'bout seein' that ceremony," he averred, "'countin' it might be 'barrassin' to Clematis with her wukin' right in the house with me an' Margerine an' havin' been down to the bottom of all his trouble between us. So I siggists that I'll telephone Lawyer Evans Chew, which is got the right to ma'y folks, an' let him prefohm the ceremony. Also I is gwine lef' with him the thutty-five dollars which you is jue when you ma'ies Clematis an' he'll pay it to you cash money."

Cephus was not carried away with the idea, but he failed to produce a valid objection. Jasper telephoned Lawyer Chew.

"What time they designates fo' the ceremony, Jasper?"

Jasper questioned Cephus and gave the answer.

"Fo' o'clock this afternoon. An' Cephus says make it sho't so's Clematis c'n git back to Mr. Kohler's house in time to cook supper. He

says now him an' her is gwine be ma'ied he wan's to be sho' she don't lose her job."

"Fo' 'clock it is. They c'n git way by fo'-fifteen. Reckon a widder don' need so much advice like a young girl does."

Cephus borrowed two dollars from Jasper—on account.

Then he set out to purchase a trousseau while Jasper journeyed to Lawyer Chew's office. He found that gentleman positive on only one point.

"You is got to be heah in my office at fo'-thutty," he commanded.

"But I cain't. I is wukkin' an'—"

"You is gwine put in pussonal 'pearance heah at fo'-thutty this evenin', Jasper Scrubb, or you is gwine be mis'abler than what you a'ready is fo' the rest of yo' bohn days."

"Wh-what you mean?"

"I means all what I says an' cumsider'bly mo' besides. You is placed the case of yo' dimestic 'tanglements an' difficulties in the han's of the best cullud lawyer what they is in this heah noble an' sov'eign state of Alabama an' when you or any other man does that they gits prompt an' satisfract'ry action. But also they is got to 'bey my d'rections. Fo'-thutty!"

Jasper obtruded upon the kitchen of the Kohler home during the next few hours. There

was no hint of mercy in Margerine's icy aloofness and still less warmth in Clematis' manner.

Clematis no more resembled a bride-to-be-soon than she did a sweet potato. Even less—yes, Jasper admitted, a good deal less. But perhaps this was due to the fact that Clematis was no amateur at the bride business.

He wondered whether Clematis had ever confessed to Cephus that she was a grass widow. Sod widow—that was a different thing. But a divorcée! Jasper was not sure that Cephus had not planned a double-cross until he heard Clematis talking with Mrs. Kohler at three o'clock.

Clematis insisted that she be allowed time off between three-thirty and four-thirty that afternoon.

“Where are you going, Clematis?”

“Oh,” vaguely, “jes’ downtown fo’ a few minutes.”

“To do what?”

“Nothin’ special.” Jasper chuckled to himself. “Li’l’ shoppin’ I reckon—or sumthin’.”

“Will you be back positively at four-thirty?”

“Yassum, Mis’ Kohler—I sho’ will, ma’am. ‘Tain’t nothin’ pawtant an’ I ain’t gwine be delayed.”

Jasper was genuinely amused. Certainly Clematis was not advertising the bridal state into which she was stepping. But perhaps Clematis had her reasons.

At three-thirty Clematis departed. She did not look aggressively bridish. Margerine saw her go and sniffed audibly. Jasper, knowing that in a very short time Clematis' demand upon his five-dollars-a-week alimony would have ceased found his heart singing jubilantly. Also, he discovered in the thought an explanation for Clematis' outward indifference to her wedding.

Clematis didn't know that Jasper suspected the step she was about to take! Clematis planned to marry, keep Jasper in ignorance of that marriage and continue collecting the weekly alimony! The idea was stupendous—especially in view of what Jasper knew of conditions. He threw back his head and roared with laughter. Margerine whirled furiously.

“Always knowed donkeys brayed!” she snapped, and swept regally from the room.

Jasper was happy—he couldn't help being. He knew that his troubles were nearly ended. Of course Margerine was going to be angry when she learned that she had been deceived by him as to his former condition of marital servitude; but then that would have been so much less to forgive than she expected to be

called upon to condone that the reaction should prove very favorable to Jasper—and Jasper knew it. Besides he couldn't get away from the lusciousness of the knowledge that Clematis expected to keep the fact of her marriage from him, when as a matter of fact he had engineered the whole thing. That was too good. The awakening—it was almost worth the price he had been forced to pay.

At four-thirty to the minute Jasper entered the office of Lawyer Evans Chew. That chocolate-creamy gentleman greeted him happily.

“Seat yo'se'f, Mistuh Jasper Scrubb, seat yo'se'f!”

Jasper seated himself. Also he asked a question.

“Is they ma'ied?”

“Who?”

“Clematis an' Cephus.”

Lawyer Chew chuckled.

“They is about as ma'ied as a man an' woman ever was, Jasper. Yassuh, that much an' mo' so.”

Jasper sighed relievedly.

“You is sho'ly a swell lawyer, Brother Chew—'bout the swellest what is.”

His voice trailed off into nothingness. His eyes popped open. The door of the sacristy swung back and someone entered. That some-

one was a vision, a person for whom Jasper hungered. He started to his feet.

“Margerine!”

Margerine whirled and would have left, but Lawyer Chew stopped her.

“Jus’ a minute, my chile. Jus’ a minute. They is a few words to be said.”

“They is been too many said a’ready,” she returned coldly, “an’ they is been said by this man heah to Clematis Creech.”

“Clematis Jefferson you mean,” corrected Chew mildly.

“Creech her name is.”

“Was! She is now the wife of Cephus Jefferson. Now is you willin’ to lis’en to a few explanitory spostulations?”

Margerine was sufficiently jarred to be willing. She seated herself—as far away from Jasper as the confines of the little office permitted.

And Lawyer Chew talked. He rose as he talked and he resorted to gestures. His mellifluous voice rang sonorously through the little room. He started in with a dissertation on the sanctity of marriage, especially second marriages, and switched from that into a verbal disquisition on the rarity of true love. Every trick of the oratorical trade was at his tongue tip and he oozed a spirit of conciliation. No

jury of twelve men could have withstood, however little they might have understood.

Margerine didn't have a chance. She listened spellbound to the story of Jasper's first marriage, the details of how he had been tricked into it by a large and scheming lady yclept Clematis, and of how in that union there was born a child—Clematis, Junior. And of how Jasper had paid dearly for his folly, torn loose at the first legal opportunity and continued to pay ever since.

Lawyer Chew was explaining things to Margerine in great gobs. She received pleasant surprise after pleasant surprise. She learned that now that Clematis was again married the five dollars a week alimony ceased automatically, which meant an extra twenty dollars a month for herself. She learned that Jasper's child was quite right and proper. She learned that the only feeling existing between her husband and Clematis was one of mutual dislike. All in all she became conscious of the fact that every trump in the deck had been crowded into her hand and that happiness was once more hers. The scene of forgiveness fairly dripped saccharine. Jasper was so happy he found it in his heart to be grateful to the immediate past, for his climb from the nadir of misery to this

zenith of rapture was of a deliciousness hitherto never experienced.

Finally they disengaged themselves from each other's arms and turned gratefully to Lawyer Chew. Their thanks gushed forth. Lawyer Chew laughed them aside, reached into a desk drawer, extracted therefrom thirty-five dollars and handed it over to Jasper. Jasper stared at it wonderingly.

"Wha's this, Lawyer Chew?"

"Yo' money. Thutty-five dollars. Count 'em."

"How come it to be mine?"

"Tha's the money, Jasper, you give me to give Cephus Jefferson when I ma'ied him to Clematis Creech."

Jasper's knees sagged. Chew had failed to pay Cephus and Cephus was a big man!

"Sufferin' tripe! Lawyer Chew, when that man gits ahold of me now—"

"He won't do a thing to you."

"Yassuh, you ain't knowin' nothin'. He sho'ly will."

"Not a thing, Jasper, 'cause I is a'ready designated to him that if'n he does you is gwine stick him in the penitentiary fo' fraud an' false pretenses. Also Clematis."

"Wh-wh-what?"

Lawyer Chew turned the spotlight on himself and reveled in the glare.

"When cases is intrusted to me," he said unctuously, "they is intrusted to a good man—also lawyer. Now when I got this case I commenced to inwestigat. An' the fust off thing I learned, Mistuh an' Missis Scrubb, is that Clematis Creech an' Cephus Jefferson is been ma'ied since fo'teen months ago!"

"Fo'teen months!"

"Yes, suh! Clematis is been wukin' an' Cephus is been livin' on the alimony which you is been payin' her, which is how come her to keep the name Creech 'stead of her real ma'ied name—Jefferson. When I found out that you was gittin' Clematis' own husban' to co't her I ain't said nothin'. So there they was. An' when they come up heah to-day to go thoo another ceremony I tol' them what I knowed an' that if'n they ever made trouble fo' you they was both gwine be sorry. Also that Cephus was so anxious to git that thutty-five dollars he had co'ted hisse'f outen five dollars a week an' fu'thermo', that heahafter he has to s'poht yo' chile in the style she was accustomed—to make up fo' all the back alimony you has paid which you hadn't ought to of done. So there's yo' thutty-five an' they ain't no mo' weekly money to be paid out."

Jasper was thinking. He was thinking harder than he had ever thought before in his life.

And suddenly his mouth expanded into a grin and from between his lips there issued a rich, throaty laugh. Margerine snuggled her hand into his.

“Wha’s the matter, sweetness?”

“I—I—jes’ been thinkin’.”

“Thinkin’ which?”

“I—I been thinkin’, honey, ’bout how much furniture is gwine be busted up when them honeymooners begins to talk things over.”

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